

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

POWER AND ITS AMBIGUITIES

POWER AND POWERLESSNESS

A PSYCHO-SOCIAL VIEW

D. Alphonse

ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MANIPULATION

George V. Lobo

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF POWER

AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Anand Amaladass

POWER IN THE BIBLE

L. Legrand

A POWER THAT PULLS

REFLECTIONS ON THE CHURCH AND

THE EXERCISE OF POWER

Felix Wilfred

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS:

AN INDIAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Statement of Indian Theological Association

Property of
Graduate Theological Union
MAY 27 1989

JEEVADHARA

is published every month
alternately in English and Malayalam

GENERAL EDITOR

Joseph Constantine Manalel

SECTION EDITORS

The Human Problem

Felix Wilfred

The Word of God

Paul Kalluveettil

The Living Christ

Samuel Rayan

The People of God

Kuncheria Pathil

The Meeting of Religions

John B. Chethimattam

The Fulness of Life

Felix Podimattam

SECTIONAL BOARD OF EDITORS

Thomas Aykara

Kurien Kunnumpuram

EDITOR - BOOK REVIEW

J. B. Chethimattam

(Contd on inside back-cover)

JEEVADHARA

The Human Problem

POWER AND ITS AMBIGUITIES

Editor:

FELIX WILFRED

Jeevadhara

Kottayam - 686 017

Kerala, India

Tel. (091.481.) 7430

CONTENTS

	Page
Editorial	3
Power and Powerlessness a psycho-social view	5
<i>D. Alphonse</i>	
Ethical Implications of Manipulation	19
<i>George V. Lobo</i>	
Towards a Theology of Power - an Indian Perspective	33
<i>Anand Amaladass</i>	
Power in the Bible	43
<i>L. Legrand</i>	
A Power that Pulls Reflections on the Church and the Exercise of Power	57
<i>Felix Willfred</i>	
Towards a Theology of Religions: an Indian Christian Perspective	72
<i>Statement of Indian Theological Association</i>	

Editorial

"An egg from the house of the landlord will break even the grinding stone in the house of his tenant" — so goes a Tamil proverb. It portrays colourfully what is really happening with power in our society today. Persons who have no other qualifications than their drive for power sit at the helm of affairs and determine the destinies of millions of men, women and children in our villages, towns and cities. They are not simply individuals; they are part of a power-system which is maintained and manipulated by invisible hands. Power and domination are pervasive. The result is endemic poverty, misery, plunder, violence, death and destruction. The victims of power in our society are increasing at an alarming rate. Powerlessness is writ large on their faces, and that is all what they possess.

Are we then to do away with power? No. Power is a positive factor. It is indispensable to creating a world of love, fellowship and freedom. Power is a gift of God for the humanization and transformation of the world. It should grow, sprout, flower and bear fruit in every realm of life — social, political, economic, cultural etc.

Power is then something ambiguous. It should be divested of the evils it is capable of and redeemed. It needs to be constantly purified like blood, from all kinds of evils, vested interests, ideologies, pragmatism and so on. To serve humane goals power has to be accompanied by wisdom and truth nay,

when truth becomes the true power in our individual and societal life, true freedom and liberation is achieved. "Truth will make you free." (Jn 8:32)

Evidently, not all aspects of this basic human problem of power could be dealt with here. This issue reflects on power from five different angles, namely psycho-social, ethical, Indo-logical, Biblical and ecclesiological. The reader will note how they complement and reinforce each other.

Tiruchirappalli

Felix Wilfred

Power and Powerlessness a psycho-social view

Power has rarely failed to fascinate people. Those who possess it seem to be so addicted to it that, despite their protestations to the contrary, they hardly ever relinquish it voluntarily and in most cases are only coveting and contriving constantly for more of it. The powerless on the other hand do often loudly criticize the nefarious influences and corrupting consequences of power on its holders and yet seem to harbour in their hearts at least an unconscious admiration for the powerful and are themselves rarely free from secretly lusting for it. The fact is that everyone seems to want power but few are willing to accept their power need openly. Thus the need for power almost never appears naked and generally seeks various guises. Under the thick and not so thick veneer of claims to public service, dedication to the nation, call of duty and even obedience to the will of God, often one can easily detect sheer power greed masquerading itself. So much so David Winter has expressed the view that like sex and money in earlier times, and in some cultures even now, the quest for power today is one of the most repressed of human strivings¹.

But such a scenario seems to be fast changing. Power is becoming not only a frequently taken up theme in Psychology, Sociology and Political Science but also there is arising a new consciousness about power among various sections of people. Shocked by the carnage of World War II and the mass murders of maniacs like Hitler and Stalin and having been brought to the very brink of nuclear holocaust, all thinking people are asking anew questions regarding the nature and inner

1. Winter D, *The Power Motive*, 1973. p. 3, New York: Free Press

dynamics of power, its proper use and possible misuse, satisfactory limits to be set and clear goals to be explicitated and above all the character of the powerholders.

What is even more striking is the ever louder voice of the powerless. These groups and sections of people who have been deprived of power for so long are starting today to demand openly their rightful share of it. They want to become active agents of their own destiny and ask for a say in the forging of the future instead of allowing history to be made behind their backs. That is why slogans such as 'power to the people', 'power to the workers', 'black power', 'dalit power', 'sisterhood is powerful', 'participation by the laity' are increasingly resounding from all sides today. This new awareness of and active struggle for power has certainly the very positive potential of being able to cut at the very roots of prevalent social, economic, political and religious systems which, though proclaiming and pretending to be based on the principle of equality for all, are in fact often nothing better than oppressive oligarchies. But not all the movements of the powerless have proved themselves either to be free from succumbing to the seductions of power once they have gained it.

Thus a new look into the nature and bases of power, its forms and functions, and its pathological consequences and their causes is more urgent than ever. This paper is an effort in that direction and seeks to present some gleanings, without the least pretence to comprehensiveness, from a few significant recent socio-psychological studies into power.

Power in search of a definition!

Power is more easily experienced and exercised than correctly defined. Many have tried to offer definitions of it none of which has so far gained general acceptability. The most often cited definition is that of the well known sociologist, Max Weber.

Weber defines power as 'the possibility that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance regardless of the basis on which this possibility rests'². The weakness

2. Weber M, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 1947, p. 152, Chicago. Free Press

of Weberian definition has been pointed out by Talcot Parsons. It seems to assume that power is by its very nature conflictual implying a necessary antagonism between the holder of power and one upon whom it is exercised. It appears to discount the possibility that power situations can be consensual constituted by a relationship of mutual benefit³. However, an alternative definition put forward by Parsons himself⁴ has been equally criticized for making just the contrary assumption. The Parsonian definition seems to imply that the exercise of power is always legitimate and consensual and to ignore the fact that it is often exercised by someone *over* others⁵. Other definitions proposed from different perspectives have all been similarly faulted for failing to take into account one or another of the essential dimensions of power.

In the context of such scientific definitions proving themselves to be inadequate some authors have been forced to fall back on common sense or intuitional views of power. One such noteworthy description is the following proposed by R. A. Dahl: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'⁶. Even Dahl's description has a flaw by being too narrowly sociological like those of Weber and Parsons in so far as it restricts power to interpersonal and intersystemic exchanges alone and seems to leave out purely personal forms of it. As David McClelland rightly asks, 'But must *all* who experience power have as their ultimate goal the exercise of power over others?'⁷.

Thus we are left with working definitions of power which are rather generalized. What they may lack in terms of scientific precision could be offset by way of their comprehensiveness. For our purposes, therefore, it may suffice to understand power as 'the ability to bring about the intended

3. Parsons T, *Politics and Social Structure*, 1969, pp. 353ff New York: Free Press.

4 Ibid p.361

5. Martin R, *The Sociology of Power*, 1977, p. 38, London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul.

6. Dahl R. A, 'On the Concept of Power', *Behavioral Sciences*, 1957, pp. 202-203

7. McClelland D, *Power: the Inner Experience*, 1975, P. 17, New York. Irvington

effect'. Such an effect may be on self in which case it is personal power; when it is on other individuals in dyadic relationships power is interpersonal and when a group or community becomes the agent or the object, power is social. Of course, these three kinds of power are never as separate as they might seem. In fact in their ideal forms they not only co-exist but also co-determine one another. For, it is only through power over self that one discovers the possible power over others, and control over others invariably does confirm and reinforce the feeling of personal power. Anyway power over others without power over self can be nothing but pathological.

The bases of power

What are the sources from which one derives power? When speaking of the sources or bases of power a distinction between psychological and sociological factors may prove helpful. The psychological bases are primarily, though not exclusively, related to personal power and the sociological similarly to social power. This is certainly not to deny that the psychological bases may also contribute to social power and the sociological bases to personal power. For one of the very fundamental tenets of Social Psychology is that there is always an overflow of the psychological into the sociological and vice versa.

Researches into the psychology of personality and its development have unveiled many psychological or inner sources of power. Of these the most important ones are love, acceptance and security offered by others of significance particularly during childhood. Anxiety resulting from persistent rejection and insecurity in the early developmental years seem to do permanent damage to the very roots of personality. Inability to develop trust and confidence in others causes lack of trust and confidence in oneself⁸. Which is the essential prerequisite for a sense of personal power.

Another inner source of power is the experience of success and esteem by others. It is the success in one's

⁸ Erikson E, *Childhood and Society*, 1963, pp. 247 ff, New York: Norton (2nd edn.),

initial efforts to control one's bodily movements and to master elementary forms of speech and the ensuing appreciation from others that provide the growing child with the necessary drive and sense of competence to take up ever greater tasks and adventures. At a more mature stage love for one's friends or marital partner and family is able to generate enormous inner strength. Similarly personal conviction about an ideal or cause can also become a source of heroic inner power.

As for the sociological bases of power, six of them can be considered as major. They are information, coercion, reward, reference, expertise and legitimacy⁹. *Information* is the persuasive or dissuasive input in communication whereby compliance results. Such a communicational content consists of an appeal to the emotions, intellect or even to the subliminal suggestibility. The latter is exploited by modern mass medial propagandists and advertizers with telling effect. *Coercion* and *reward* are respectively the threat of punishment and the offer of inducement of physical, moral or spiritual kind by which the agent of power is able to secure compliance. *Reference* can be seen in relationship situations in which compliance follows due to one's identification with the holder of power. Identification may originate from affection and love, infatuation as in hero-worship or respect based on moral or spiritual excellence. *Expertise* is the greater knowledge or skill attributed to the agent of power by those who comply.

Legitimacy generally refers to authority which is legitimized, as Max Weber has pointed out, in terms of either a rational-legal system, tradition or charisma¹⁰. The power of authority has been strikingly demonstrated by the experiments of Stanley Milgram in which about 60% of the volunteer participants in the experimental role of teachers were ready to administer extremely dangerous levels

9. French J. R. P. & Raven B. H, 'The Bases of Social Power', in Cartwright D (ed.), *Studies in Social Power*, 1959, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press

10. Weber M, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, 1947, pp. 324 ff, Chicago: Free Press

of electric shock, some as high as 450 watts, to experimental learners on the orders of the experimenter perceived as a legitimate authority figure¹¹.

Is powerlessness the ideal ?

Popular wisdom regarding the baneful effects of power is well expressed in the oft quoted statement of Lord Acton: Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And even a random look at the history of peoples and nations seems only to confirm this view. But then if power corrupts can we really do without it? Is powerlessness or the renunciation of power the ideal?

In the prevailing cultural context of democratic and egalitarian consciousness one might naturally come to believe that all power is evil and illegitimate. Having freed oneself from theocratic, hierarchic, fascist, colonialist and other forms of monopolistic power one might easily be persuaded to imagine the ideal society as one in which none has power over others. Anyone holding power may come to be regarded as an oppressor who has by force or fraud deprived others of their power. Marxian vision of the classless society seems to contain at least partly such a romantic concept of community living of humans without any exercise of political power over others. For in the final future ushered in by the success of the proletarian struggle not only the capitalist super and subordination would have been eliminated but also the state would have disappeared¹².

The utopian character of such concepts about society has been pointed out by T. Parsons¹³. As Sik Hung Ng remarks, "A society without a power structure is inconceivable, at least on Earth. Man cannot function with his power motive castrated, at least not as a healthy man"¹⁴. Many

11. Milgram S, *Obedience to Authority*, 1975, New York, Harper & Row.

12. Marx K. & Engels F. *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, 1964, New York- Doubleday

13. Parsons T, *Politics and Social Structure*, 1969, pp. 353 ff New York: Free Press

14. Ng S. H, *The Social Psychology of Power*, 1980, London: Academic Press

eminent psychologists have also with equal force and clarity put forward the view that power is not only inevitable but also essential to individual psychic health and growth as well as social organization and development.

It is Alfred Adler who first highlighted the fundamental need for power in the process of individual psychological development. According to him, striving for power or superiority, which in his latter writings he increasingly changed to striving for perfection, is the most basic drive in the human person. The initial and the most pervasive threat to psychic well-being and maturation that a child encounters is powerlessness or inferiority and the consequent insecurity. The inherent motivation for power and mastery is not only the defense against this threat but also the unifying life force or core dynamism at the root of all human interactions. "Behaviour is determined by a goal, one which shows itself as nothing other than a goal of superiority, of power, of overcoming others"¹⁵. Particularly in his later works Adler has time and again emphasized that the best form of overcoming inferiority and of acquiring power is by social interest. Real power is not dominance or mastery over other men but the ability to commit oneself in service to the perfection of society¹⁶.

Karen Horney also considers the striving for power as a manifestation of a normal personality¹⁷. And more recently Erik H. Erikson has worked out a psychology of personality development with power as one of its central elements. According to him, psychological development is basically a growth in ego-strength with each developmental stage having as its primary task the acquiring of a specific strength¹⁸.

15. Adler A, *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*, 1956, p. 113, New York: Harper & Row,

16. Adler A, *Superiority and Social Interest*, 1964, Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

17. Horney K, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* in Vol I of *The Collected Works*, 1937, P. 162, New York: Norton

18. Erikson E, *Insight and Responsibility*, 1964, pp. 111 ff New York: Norton

Forms of power exercise

Corresponding to the ego-developmental stages of Freud and those of Erikson a classification of the ways of experiencing and expressing power into four forms or modalities has been proposed by David McClelland¹⁹. This classification is made on two bases: first, the source of power -- whether it is self or outside self; second, the object of power -- whether the self or outside. Thus the following four modalities of exercising power are possible: 1) source outside and object self; 2) source self and object self; 3) source self and object outside and 4) source outside and object outside. We can name these four forms successively as dependent power, autistic power, dominating power and vocational power.

1) Dependent power

This is the infantile form of power. The infant does not yet have much of inner strength or its own resources. He draws sustenance and strength for himself from his mother and others. This is the oral stage of sucking in and of total dependence. People fixated in this form of self-experience and expression continue to depend overly on others for their sense of self esteem, competence and control. Their strength devolves from their dependence on some others powerful and it is only through the power of these can they experience themselves as powerful. Theirs is a vicarious power through their identification with someone powerful. When this person rejects them or dies or proves not that powerful they are forced to face their own inner weakness or emptiness, the unbearability of which might lead them to drugs or alcohol, amnesia, depression and even to suicide. This would explain the death or suicide of some of the followers of a guru or political leader when the latter dies, or is dethroned from power.

When a majority of people in a country or culture function with dependent power it becomes a fertile field for the rise of totalitarian forms of government and public institutions and political parties with an overcentralized and

19. McClelland D, *Power: the Inner Experience*, 1975, pp. 13 ff, New York; Irvington

anti-democratic style of functioning. Religions which are popular in these cultures would make God everything and reduce man to nothing. Expectation of miraculous solutions to mundane problems would be encouraged and petitionary forms of prayers and novenas would prove popular. Religious fundamentalism and fanaticism would easily prevail and decisions would be legitimized by an uncritical appeal to the 'word' of God and 'will' of the founder.

2) Autistic power

This is the form of power associated with the anal stage of child development. The neural and muscular growth enables the child to control his bodily movements and defecation, to stand up and to assert himself by refusing the command of others and to behave with certain measure of autonomy. This is the stage when a child starts experiencing himself as the source and centre of its power. The one fixated in this form of power experience, would be often excessively preoccupied with his own rights, autonomy and privacy. He might overemphasize will-power, self-control, self-sufficiency and physical exercise. He may seek to accumulate possessions which he sees as his own extensions and as making himself feel strong.

Laissez-faire liberalism and the capitalist system are the socio-cultural and economic expressions of this form of power exercise. These societies may seriously commit themselves to the defense of individual human rights but would blissfully close their eyes to massive social injustices. Religions in this phase would overemphasize asceticism, contemplation and withdrawal from this wicked world to save one's soul and reliance on ritualism.

3) Dominating power

This is the form found in the phallic stage when the child experiences his own power by exploring his environment, manipulating external objects by physical activity, and seeks to control others by aggressiveness, persuasion, bargaining and other kinds of manipulative behaviour. Adults who have not grown out of this form of power exercise are able to feel superior only by making others inferior. They will not hesitate to manoeuvre,

scheme, betray, cheat or use threat so that they win at any cost. They have to compete constantly and conquer in every argument, game or transaction. With them even helping others may become a means of asserting their own superiority. In love life Don Juan is their typical representative.

Imperialist and expansionist countries are the socio-cultural embodiments of this phallic form of power. When such colonial conquests and adventuristic military moves are not possible they still endeavour to remain number one by amassing weapons and often behave like international street bullies by interfering in the affairs of other countries by covert and overt ways seeking to establish everywhere their kind of *pax romana*. Propagandist religious movements may be seen also as expressive of this form of power. They accentuate proselytizing based on the belief that they alone have the monopoly of truth and others are all wallowing in darkness and idolatry and deserve to be destroyed.

4) Vocational power

This is the form of power appropriate to the post-pubertal and more mature stages of personality development. This developmental phase starting in adolescence is characterized by the progressive predominance of the other, first the marital partner, then children and later by a more intense commitment to the community. The choice of one's vocation in life taking place in this period orients the person towards service to society. One is thus enabled to abandon increasingly one's self-preoccupation and to experience the other as the centre of one's life and the source of its meaning and strength. In this phase, as McClelland describes, "the self drops out as a source of power drive and a person sees himself as an instrument of a higher authority which moves him to try to influence or serve others"²⁰. The typical examples of this vocational form of power are the founders of world religions, the prophets, social reformers, leaders of liberation struggles or movements and at a more prosaic level, the corporate executives who have all sub-ordinated their own personal goals to those of a higher agency.

20 Ibid, 1975, p. 20

This vocational form of power exercise, though the most mature of the four, is not without possible dangers of which 'Messianism' is perhaps the more typical one. Messianism as a psychological term, refers to a kind of self delusion in which the subject imagines himself as the man stamped by destiny or chosen by God to execute His will directly. He may come to see himself as being unlike any other and as the actualizer of grandiose phantasies. He may also easily confuse his own desires with the will of God and his own unconscious needs may be passed off as God's commands or as great community ideals. As for religions there is a healthy messianic consciousness in the best of them which has undeniably translated itself in great service to humanity. But it has also been easily and often exaggerated into 'messianism' leading to the persecution of dissenters, justification of inquisitorial methods and the declaration of crusades and holy wars — all in the name of honouring God and safeguarding the true faith. Messianism is not exclusively a religious phenomenon. There are also many cultural and political versions of it.

Thus in spite of being the most mature modality of power exercise in so far as vocational power does contain the twin danger of getting fixated and getting exaggerated there is the need of going beyond it. This may be done by retaining the flexibility of exercising other forms of power as may be appropriate to the situation and by explicitly providing for constant evaluation by the community of all forms of power exercise.

Pathologies of power and powerlessness

As it has already been indicated in the preceding section pathology is possible in any form of power exercise due to fixation and exaggeration. But what is the cause of these fixations and exaggerations? Recent psychological studies have shown that along with lack of love and acceptance during the early years, any sustained involvement in a non-egalitarian relationship with its resultant experience of powerlessness or accumulated power, may be also a pathogenic factor.

As Adler has pointed out when the normal and healthy search for power is frustrated and when one is repeatedly exposed to the experience of inferiority, powerlessness and

humiliation, one's level of anxiety assumes neurotic proportions giving rise to various psychic disfunctions. Anxiety induces overcompensation for the feeling of inferiority resulting in compulsive behaviour, dominating or possessive attitudes, drug or alcoholic addictions, gambling or other forms of excessive risk takings etc.

Even most of social conflicts and violence can be seen as having their origin in this neurotic search for personal power. When one is denied power the normal need for mastery and the striving for social perfection degenerates into a mis-directed drive for mastery over men. What ought to grow into a healthy socialized form of power becomes pathologically personalized and the development of others and society is replaced by an exclusive and exaggerated self-aggrandizement as the principal dynamism of one's interactions. Thus a person seeking domination over others is in fact not doing it from his strength but to mask his own inner weakness from himself and from others²¹.

Karen Horney also similarly distinguishes between the normal and neurotic need for power. The manifestations of the neurotic striving for power, according to her, are an attitude of omniscience and omnicompetence coupled with an inability to ask for or accept advice or help, an aura of infallibility with an inability to accept one's mistakes, obsequiousness and slavishness towards superiors, in contrast to contempt for and repressiveness towards inferiors, inflexibility, lack of feeling and impassivity, over control with the need to know all details, insistence that his directions are followed to the letter, megalomaniac phantasies and the need for flattery, being particular about titles of honour and other insignia of power, constant complaints about the ingratitude of subordinates coupled with a martyr complex²².

In a similar vein Abraham Maslow contrasts the authoritarian personality with the democratic one. While the authoritarian character seeks power over people the democratic

21. Clark K. B. 'The Pathos of Power'. *American Psychologist*, 26, pp. 1047-1057, 1971.

22. Horney K, *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* in Vol I of *The Collected Works*, 1937, pp. 166 ff

one seeks strength to overcome social, intellectual and other problems and to serve others²³. Apart from the emotional and character disorders that accrue from powerlessness as seen above, M. Seligman has shown through his experiments with animals and humans that situations of uncontrollability or helplessness bring about motivational and cognitive disturbances. He sees also powerlessness as linked to passivity, depression and susceptibility to death²⁴.

If powerlessness is psychologically damaging what about the concentration of power? The experiments of D. Kipnis indicate that the accumulation of power in a relationship of inequality has also a highly dehumanizing potential and leads to many cognitive, emotional and character disorders. In stable relationships involving unresisted inequality of power the superordinate powerholder tends to manipulate the subordinates, to overestimate his own ability and achievement while underestimating the skills and contributions of the subordinates, to develop contempt for them and socially to distance himself from them. Superordinate power seems also to lead the powerholder to regard himself as a superior being who is above the common code of behaviour. He may conduct himself as though there is one morality for himself and another, naturally a more strict one, for his subordinates²⁵.

Conclusion

To the problems of power exercise neither the individualistic accumulation of additional power nor the abdication of it all is the right solution. From a psychological point of view the solution would seem to lie in the direction of a new kind of education, as Alfred Adler used to stress, which would train all citizens to channellize and fulfil their power quest in social commitment.

An important element of this new education would be the formation for parenting so that every child experiences

23. See Maslow A, 1947, p. 405

24. Seligman M, *Helplessness; On Depression, Development and Death*, 1975, p. 21 ff & 168, San Francisco: Freeman

25. Kipnis D, 'Does Power Corrupt?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 24, pp. 33-41, 1972

acceptance, love and esteem enabling him to grow into an adult who seeks not power over people as a prop against his inner insecurity but power to serve others in society. But the effective achievement of this programme would never be possible unless there is also a radical restructuring of the socio-political and economic order so that everyone's basic needs are met and he is able to develop all his potentialities to the optimum.

This immediately points to the fact that power distribution as well as exercise involves a question of social justice and is thus ultimately an ethical problem. This becomes evident when we realize that power accumulated is always power deprived of from others and power abdicated gets always accumulated with some others. We are also made to become acutely aware of the ethical dimension of power exercise by present day technologies due to which power exercise is becoming increasingly unanimous and subtly manipulative. This is a situation fraught with enormous dangers of the possible dehumanizing uses of power.

Thus what is primarily needed today is a new ethics of power exercise — an ethics having as its basis not only the principle of 'equal power for all', but also that of 'power to the powerless'. It is only when all our education, psychotherapies, social analysis and, above all, the political and economic restructuring start to move on the axis of such an ethics, will we be able to see a human society free from the pathologies of power and powerlessness and a future without war or violence.

Ethical Implications of Manipulation

Ethics and Manipulation

The word 'manipulate' comes from the Latin *manus*, a hand and *pellere*, to push. The word 'hand' can evoke the idea of a gentle touch or the use of the limb to guide. It could mean 'to handle with skill' as a doctor handling surgical instruments for the good of the patient. However, it has mostly come to mean 'to control or play upon by artful, unfair or insidious means, especially to one's own advantage'. In spite of the ambiguity of the term which, for instance, could equally denote shaking hands to express affection or to push a person around, here it will be taken in the pejorative sense.

There has always been manipulation of man by man or of a group by group. In primitive society, the elders manipulated the young to make them conform to accepted mores and the dominant classes manipulated the lower classes to suit their vested interests. However, of late, the extent and depth of manipulation has reached enormous proportions because of the advance of technology as well as the behavioural sciences¹. These could be used for bringing about a better environment or social atmosphere and hence are far from evil in themselves. But they can easily be misused to dominate and use human beings for selfish purposes. Manipulation has also become much more conscious and planned.

The key ethical concept of negative manipulation is the treatment of man as an *object* or thing and not the *subject* of intrinsic dignity and rights. The personhood of man made to the image of God calls for unconditional respect. The

1. Cf. J. Ellul, *The Ethic of Freedom*, London, Mowbray's, 1971, p. 383

human person may never be treated as a means or tool for any purpose, however urgent or exalted it may seem, as in the case of an ideology. He may not be manipulated even for what seems his own good. Intrinsic degradation of a man by treating him as an object can never be justified by the pretext of securing some good for him. His basic rights may not be violated for the sake of securing any advantage either for himself or for society at large.

Moral development and education

An authentic human and christian ethic is characterized by freedom. Moral formation is initiation to responsible decision. It is not behavioural conditioning. This is based on the phenomenon of 'conditioned reflex' observed by P. Pavlov in rats. B. F. Skinner developed the theory of Behaviourism or behavioural modification through various positive and negative reinforcements. Since, according to him, man has always been manipulated by his environment, it is better to do it consciously and systematically by those who are most competent!

This approach denies the reality of conscience and human freedom. However, B. Häring wryly remarks: "I think that he (Skinner) has proved that people, whose motives are no higher than to avoid pain and to be remunerated for whatever they do, can be thoroughly manipulated by 'adversive' (punitive) and 'non-adversive' (rewarding) reinforcements"².

Authoritarian religious leaders and educators think that people can be educated to morality through a system of rewards and punishments whether in this world or the next. Such an approach is open to grave abuse, and in any case will not result in genuine morality as a responsible and free answer to the call of God and growth in interpersonal love. On the other hand, authentic moral development is growth in inner freedom.

Erich Fromm describes the free, anti-manipulative growth of the human person thus: "Well-being I would describe as the ability to be creative, to be aware, and to respond"

2. *Free and Faithful for Christ*, Slough, St. Paul Publications, 1979-
Vol. II, p. 63.

to be independent and fully active, and by this very fact, to be one with the world. To be concerned with *being* and not with *having*, to experience joy in the very act of living, and to consider living creatively as the only meaning of life"³.

While man is called to be co-creator with God in transforming human life, a purely technological mentality leads to a one-dimensional man, the vicious circle of being a 'manipulated manipulator'. As B. Haring puts it: "One who knows only the single dimension of the marketable and organizable is the unredeemed person, the creator of the competitive, exploitative and violent society. Whoever lives all his life in the market-place, without any higher perspective, will always degrade his fellowmen, will try to 'manufacture' him, to use, manipulate and consume him"⁴.

Hence the pursuit of science for the benefit of mankind calls for wisdom and great sensitivity to the boundary lines between material things and human persons. The intrinsic value of the human person should be a determining criterion in any moral judgement. The moral law can be an expression of the respect due to persons. But legalism itself is one of the ways of manipulating persons as things. This should be steadfastly avoided in Christian life.

The Indian educational system was deliberately devised for training efficient and faithful servants of the British empire. It was directed to inculcate an admiration for alien ways and thought patterns so that the interests of the colonial masters be served. The system has basically not changed. Even now it caters to the interests of the local dominating classes and international neocolonialism.

Of late, education is more and more losing what integrated perspective it had. It is geared to the shaping of the *homo faber*, of men and women trained to efficiency in running the technological and beaurocratic machines and in turn

3. 'Values, Psychology and Human Existence', in A. H. Maslow, ed., *New Knowledge in Human Values*, Chicago, Regnery, 1971, p. 163.

4. *Manipulation: Ethical Boundaries of Medical, Behavioural and Genetic Manipulation*, Slough, St. Paul Publications, 1975, p. 53.

being conditioned by them. The findings of the behavioural sciences are used to mould the thinking of the child according to preestablished pragmatic goals. Put in plain language, he is 'educated' for the process of production and consumption in order to further the cause of economic development at the cost of human values.

Manipulation in the religious field

There is first of all the question of manipulative use of religious authority. While there is an ever present danger of misuse of authority in civil society, manipulation could be much more oppressive in religious society. Here the claim to authority is more directly based on divine sanction. Any challenge is considered as disobedience to God. Thereby the inner conscience itself is sought to be manipulated. At times the threat of excommunication (ostracism) is used. We see this happening now particularly among the Bohra Muslims and the Sikh Panth.

The Church herself has not been free from this kind of manipulation. It is utterly incompatible with her mission of bringing about liberation. As B. Häring puts it: 'By her special vocation the Church is expected to be an effective sign and school of liberty. Manipulation within the Church, and any attempt by her authorities to interfere in a manipulative way in the life of citizens, have therefore to be forcefully rejected'⁵.

Fostering superstition and taking advantage of the credulity of people is a despicable form of manipulation. Some religious leaders, not to talk of professional sorcerers, play on the fears and anxieties of people and propagate all kinds of superstitious practices. The Church has the role of freeing herself from every form of superstition and spread the message of genuine religion 'in spirit and in truth' among all people. There is need of purifying the meaning of religious symbols so that they express true faith in God and lead to a spirit of love and service.

Popular devotions cannot be condemned because they are not to the taste of religious elite. But they should

5. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

not cater to a blind faith and be the instrument of manipulation in the hands of interested elements. They should be seen as an extension of the core of Christian worship which is the celebration of the sacraments of the Church. There should be enough room for creativity, not only by experts, but the people themselves.

Pilgrimages can be a very meaningful expression of the search for the Absolute as well as of the solidarity of the faithful. They should be conducted in such a way as to bring about the desired fruits. There is particular need of caution lest they become means of profiteering by merchants, tourist agencies and at times even religious leaders.

Manipulation of public opinion

Apart from the countries within the socialist power block, all the nations of the remaining so called 'free world' are dominated by a gigantic military-industrial complex. The manipulation of people within socialist countries is too well known. Every aspect of life is controlled by the state and party apparatus to bring about progress according to a particular ideology. Some progress in the area of economic development and a certain degree of distributive justice and liberation from feudal structures has indeed been achieved. But this has entailed a near complete manipulation of public opinion according to the party line.

In the numerous dictatorships this side of the 'iron curtain' the control of public opinion has been unabashed. This has been approved by the leaders of the so called 'free world' as a means of making the world 'free for democracy'! In the apparently democratic countries, the manipulation of public opinion has been more subtle, but for that matter no less insidious.

Modern mass media — the press, the radio and television have come in handy to mould public opinion in favour of the dominant ideology of communism or the furtherance of the power of capitalism. It is true that the media have a great potentiality for good and in fact have brought the world together so that we can even speak of the 'global village'. But there has also been a grave violation of human freedom and

dignity by the manipulation of ideas and tastes of people, including the educated classes.

A small group of people controlling the military-industrial complex seem to set the agenda. They first manipulate the so called elite who are only too willing to collaborate since they reap the prime advantage from the process. The next circle is the wider intelligentsia who are particularly vulnerable to the machinations of the printed media. The masses are easily influenced by the electronic media, especially those using visual images.

The dominant elements mould public opinion to further the advantage of vested interests. The very democratic process is vitiated by the promotion of elements that will defend and promote those interests. In the United States, for instance, an electoral circus is conducted every four years with two mediocre candidates made to fight what looks like a mighty battle, but in fact is meant to divert attention from the machinations of the military-industrial lords who operate largely from behind the scene. Those who are more or less aware of the game increasingly abstain from voting, but feel incapable of changing it. In the latest election only 49% are reported to have exercised their franchise.

In a genuine democracy, the press can have a most valuable role in defending human rights and promoting human values. A certain section of the press does seek to achieve this. But within the capitalistic system it is mostly dominated by press barons closely linked with the economic vested interests. Their support to particular parties is mainly determined by the stand they take concerning these interests. There is an apparent show of highlighting the woes of the masses or particular violations of human rights. But the whole presentation is geared to maintaining the status quo if not increase the grip of the dominant elements in society.

It would be quite justifiable to adopt a particular viewpoint in making editorial comment. But the very presentation of news is tailored to suit a particular purpose. Headlines, photos and other forms of attracting the attention of the reader are primarily used with this intention. Very frequently

half truths and downright falsehoods are uttered. When misinformation or disinformation is the order of the day, the basic right of the public for correct information is violated. The intelligentsia are at times so brain-washed that they blindly accept the line laid down by the press barons. Skilled journalists are employed according to their ability and willingness to toe the line.

Those who control the electronic media are basically of the same class. If they are controlled by the government, the ruling party gets the advantage. But in any case the ideology of vested interests is promoted by the manner in which the programmes are presented.

Now there is a certain awareness of the manipulation of the electronic media in India by the government. But there seems to be a gross ignorance regarding the functioning of the press barons. It almost looks as if the literate are more amenable to manipulation than the illiterate who are not exposed to the print media. This is a serious situation that needs to be examined in depth by all those who have the freedom of the press at heart.

The situation cannot be changed much by any form of legal action since control of the press by the government may only aggravate it. Perhaps a law bringing about a wide diffusion of ownership and giving greater rights to the working journalists may be of some use. But there is little chance that such a law will ever be enacted. The only solution then seems to be to bring about gradual awareness of the problem so that genuine public opinion will be aroused and the press compelled to accept responsibility for the truth and be a means of sincere struggle for human rights.

As regards conveying of information, several Western writers have noted the fragmentation of the modern mind by preoccupation with the events of the moment which decreases the capacity for reflection and thereby makes the public vulnerable to manipulation. For instance, H. I. Schiller explains how media managers become mind managers: 'Messages that intentionally create a false sense of reality and produce a consciousness that cannot comprehend or wilfully rejects the actual conditions of life, personal and social, are manipu-

lative messages. When manipulation is successful, alternate social arrangements remain unconsidered'⁶.

They also point out how inundation of the public with all kinds of information, discussions and suggestions easily creates a climate that fosters a manipulative situation⁷.

Exploitation of passions

Many of the more popular magazines and movies are well known to arouse violent passions or at least contribute to the prevailing trend to violence in society. The inborn inclination to aggressivity is exploited for the sake of selfish gain. Often crime is glorified which dulls the moral sensitivity, especially of the youth. This may not only result in individual crimes of violence, but may prepare the ground for rabble rousers and trouble makers to gather violent mobs and incite them to perform mindless acts of destruction. At times irresponsible sexual activity may be associated with the process. The abuse of mass media to incite people to acts of violence and cruelty has been rightly called the most monstrous obscenity of our time.

In India, the rousing of communal passions needs special attention. It is evident that the communal press associated with religious fundamentalists together with rumour mongers can set a whole town on fire. Even the more sedate newspapers can stoke communal fires by incessant 'analysis' of the communal situation, making wild forecasts about the electoral behaviour of different communal groups and making subtle insinuations that touch the sensibilities of the more communally inclined sections of the population.

Power of advertising

Product information is a positive factor. As B. Haring remarks: 'Of itself advertising is a good thing, an important service to the public. For what would all the accumulated products serve if those who used them were not informed about where and under what conditions they can obtain what

6. *The Mind Changers*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1973, p. 1

7. Cf. T. M. Garrett, 'Manipulation and Mass Media., *Concilium* 5(1971), N. 7., pp. 55-62

is useful and necessary'?⁸ The Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication issued by the Holy See recognizes the manifold benefits of advertisements, while insisting at the same time on respect for the truth and the buyer's liberty of choice⁹.

The positive and negative dimensions of advertising are well expressed by T. McMahon by distinguishing between the *what* and the *why*. The first is essential to the consumer. 'In a mass-produced, mass-marketed and pre-sold consumer society, accurate knowledge about product, price, promotion and place of distribution or sale (viz., 'market mix') reduces manipulation to a minimum and provides one of the basic conditions for an informed decision morally valid in a buyer seller contract'¹⁰. 'On the contrary, motivation — of interest to the seller — answers the question *why* a consumer purchases a product... The seller monopolizes the source of information... By controlling the *what* and by emphasizing the *why*, the seller effectively reduces the knowledge and consequently the freedom of the buyer in his purchases. Briefly, the seller manipulates the buyer'¹¹. Thereby, what was meant to assist the public becomes a means of exploitation.

Advertising often unduly influences the purchase of certain articles. More than that, it produces a consumerist mentality and creates new artificial needs. Especially in poor countries, this leads to the neglect of more real and basic needs. It suggests a false sense of values, for instance, that a person is worth what he buys or wears. As K. Haselden remarks, before children know the ten commandments, they absorb consciously or unconsciously the three commandments of advertisers: 'Thou shalt covet; thou shalt buy; thou shalt consume'¹².

The very way in which a lot of advertising is carried on is an offence against human rights. One of the most pernicious elements of advertising is the use of sex appeal or

8. *Free and Faithful for Christ*, Vol. II, p. 128.

9. *Communio et Progressio*, 29 January 1971, N. 59.

10. 'Manipulation and Consumer Goods', *Concilium*, 5 (1971), N. 7 p. 91.

11. *Ibid.*,

12. *McCarthy and the Mass Media*, Nashville, 4 ed., 1968, p. 144.

the allurements of the female anatomy to promote the sale of a wide spectrum of goods. Thereby the dignity of woman is grossly violated and the image of woman as an object of lust is furthered. The idea is also promoted that sexual desirability is the highest human value and the decisive criterion for all human life. Also false hopes are engendered while promoting spurious goods like remedies for curing baldness or means of improving sexual functioning. Positively harmful substances like tobacco are presented as beneficial ones.

However, the influence of the media and of advertising in particular should not be understood as fatal. As T. M. Garrett notes: "On the whole, the mass media reinforce existing perceptions and evaluations. In a fairly large number of cases they can catalyze underlying dispositions and cause the audience to make explicit what was only vaguely felt. In a very few cases the mass media cause real conversions"¹³. Hence the need for education in properly reacting to the stimuli conveyed by the media. Still, it must be recognised that great alertness and a keen critical sense would be required to resist 'hidden persuasion' or strong manipulation of the media¹⁴. This is one of the greatest challenges of our time.

Allurement of fashions

Neat and tasteful dress is surely a desirable aspect of a person's life. But dress should not be an arena for mass manipulation. Unfortunately, more and more, the exposure of people to fashion and magazines or articles in the popular press as well as display of the latest fashions in the movies and television produce a well-nigh irresistible urge to conform.

The first deleterious result is cultural alienation. People are induced to adopt fashions developed in other lands and a spiral of aping alien ways sets in. Some of the latest fashions are literally grotesque; but people seem to conform sheepishly.

The rapid change in fashions introduces the factor of obsolescence. This is brought about by a double-pronged strategy of 1) making the public style-conscious and then 2) swit-

¹³ *Art. cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁴ *OP. cit.*, p. 228.

ching styles¹⁵. None but the richest can afford the game. An inordinate share of the family budget, especially among the middle classes, is spent on changing fashions. More urgent needs are neglected. The craze for the latest fashions spreads even among the poorer who either waste their money or are deeply frustrated that they cannot have the latest.

It is regrettable to note that even those who profess Gandhian ideals seem to have abandoned his simplicity of life. In order to promote freedom and genuine well-being, there is urgent need for reacting to the manipulation in dress and behaviour.

Liberal capitalist economy

Against Marxist collectivism, the liberal capitalist system is proposed by some people as a means of safeguarding individual rights. Unless this is carefully balanced by a responsible social dimension, it becomes a cover up for a small section of the people to enrich themselves at the expense of the poor and to capture the levers of power in the whole body politic.

Thereby genuine human values are subverted. Freedom becomes the licence to amass as much wealth as possible. 'Liberal' is understood as the tolerance by the State of such a situation. Equality turns out to be only an illusion. 'Equal opportunity', the hall mark of democracy, becomes a cruel joke against the handicaps and sufferings of the poor. Regarding the evil nature of the system, B. Häring remarks: "The ideology of private property in the service of uncontrolled economic growth leads to a loss of liberty for the masses. Those who regulate the tools of technology regulate also the workers, their families and their whole lives. They are manipulators in the service of a manipulated and manipulating system"¹⁶.

Indeed the system extends itself to the international sphere. 'Free trade' is understood as the unlimited right of rich nations to capture economic power in poor countries. The so called 'aid' is often used as a way of controlling the economy and even the political structure of recipient countries. The strings attached are so many that the 'aid' in fact becomes a way of massive exploitation. A stage has now been

15. Cf. V. Packard, *op. cit.*, p. 148

16. *Manipulation*, p. 29.

reached when fresh 'aid' to many countries is scarcely enough for repayments that have fallen due. They are caught in a debt trap. This provides an opportunity for the so-called donors to interfere with the economic and political policies of the receiving countries. They are in danger of becoming satellites or neocolonial dependencies.

Unwise manipulation of the environment

The material universe has been created for the benefit of man. He has the right to mould the environment to his best advantage. Hence the right of man to shape his environment is to be exercised in a responsible way. Arbitrary interference with nature has now produced a severe ecological crisis. Water and air pollution as well as degradation of the eco system pose a serious threat to the well-being of the human family. Unthinking exploitation of the earth's resources has made man's earthly abode less congenial and hospitable. There is a danger that this might lead to cataclysmic disasters enveloping vast numbers of people. The Bhopal and Chernobyl tragedies are a warning of what may happen if wisdom is sacrificed to the advantage of blind technological progress or unrestricted appetite for profit.

Interference with the environment for the sake of gigantic development schemes like the building of huge dams has immense consequences. The flora and fauna of a vast region might be disturbed, and a large area of cultivable land might be submerged, or precious cultural monuments and treasures might be destroyed. Often a considerable number of poor people would be displaced. In all these there is need for a judicious balancing of all the factors and the maximum effort at rehabilitating those who might suffer from the implementation of the scheme.

Manipulation in the medical field

Every medical intervention has an element of functional manipulation. This should not lead to the manipulation of persons. The line should be carefully drawn between genuine therapeutic procedures and unacceptable manipulation.

Medical personnel must be careful to regard the patient

as a person and not as a 'case'¹⁷. His human dignity must always be respected. Illness often diminishes the freedom and self-respect of the patient. Hence one of the prime goals of genuine therapy is to restore the patient's sense of dignity and freedom.

Medical experimentation should always respect the intrinsic worth and autonomy of the subjects. Patient autonomy is a very important factor in therapy. As B. Häring puts it: 'Human health and therapy are dependent on free and dignified self-realization. While healing some function, the doctor cannot lose sight of the concept of total health and maximum autonomy as the end of therapy. Seeking this goal, the physician and the patient are partners in a covenant of fidelity and mutual respect. Neither should try to manipulate the other'¹⁸.

Recent advances in bio-technology seem to offer unlimited scope for somatic and psychic modifications. These can be used for genuine healing or for manipulation of the human person. Specialization is one of the factors that is ambiguous in character. It can serve the good of patients or lead to 'reductionism' that absolutizes one particular aspect or approach. This can easily lead to treating the patient as an object. Hence today there is all the more need for a truly 'holistic' vision of health and healing.

Potent modern drugs may bring about quick relief or cure. But they can be the source of undue manipulation. The whole drug industry and trade are reeking of corrupt practices¹⁹. The cost of medicines is highly inflated. Multinational companies sell the same basic drug under diverse brand names that mystify medical practitioners who are at the mercy of brochures supplied by the manufacturers. Gifts and other inducements are widely used to influence health care centres and doctors in their selection of drugs. Dangerous drugs are continued to be sold and prescribed even after they have been

17. See P. Ramsey, *Patient as Person*, New Haven, Conn., Yale University Press, 1970.

18. *Manipulation*, pp. 80-90.

19. See my article, 'Medical Ethics Forum: Ethical Problems in Drug Prescription', *Health Action*, I (1988), N. 8, pp. 42-43.

banned by the government on the advice of the World Health Organization.

Genetic engineering is legitimate when it is used for a truly therapeutic purpose. But attempting to produce a superior race by the modification of chromosomes would imply a grave violation of human dignity apart from posing a threat to the well-being of future generations. The criteria adopted for the selection of genes would be arbitrary according to the prejudices of the experimenters.

Genetic counselling too is not without grave dangers. It would be totally impermissible to abort unborn babies because they are defective. On the other hand, responsible parenthood would imply avoidance of conception when the chances of begetting gravely defective offspring are high. However, there is no need for being alarmed that the progress of medicine would make too many carriers of genetic defects to reach the reproductive age and thereby pose a threat to the hereditary health of mankind. The gene pool of mankind has a high capacity for adaptive mutation. What is to be more feared is ecological degradation that may induce dangerous mutations in the genetic pool²⁰.

Conclusion

The field for the manipulation of man is very wide. Many of the ways in which it is done are interrelated. Moreover, the whole tendency to manipulate arises from some basic attitudes, particularly 1) not recognizing the intrinsic dignity and inviolability of the human person; 2) seeking selfish profit oriented goals.

People are getting more and more aware of the evil of manipulation as is seen in the massive revolt against oppression. But the lack of an integral vision and of co-operation among all people of good will makes much of the effort futile. There is no need of being pessimistic about the matter; nor should there be passivity and complacency. A vigorous and cooperative effort can do a lot to counter manipulation and promote the true well-being of the human community.

20. Cf. B Haring, *Manipulation*, pp. 162-172.

Towards a Theology of Power - an Indian Perspective

When the concept of power and authority is studied from a christian point of view and presented in a collection of articles, as in the case of the present volume, it is quite irresistible to include also a contribution from an Indian perspective. But the Indian notion of power is so complex a reality that it cannot be treated in a short article giving due importance to all its aspects from different traditions. However, an attempt is here made to highlight a few aspects of the understanding of power from a religious and theological perspective of the Hindu traditions.

1. Preliminary remarks on the notion of power

John Woodroffe in a popular vein called the Indian religion the religion of power referring to the realm of *Śakti*. The concept of 'Sakti' is usually associated with the tantric religion of India but it is not peculiar to the *Śaktas*. Every Hindu believes in Sakti as God's power though the nature of the universe created by it may vary in each tradition. No attempt, however, is made here to present the concept of Sakti as understood in the tantric tradition¹. On the whole, the word 'Sakti' denotes 'power' in a comprehensive way — God as Mother and the universe as originating from her womb.

Secondly, in India *wisdom* is considered power, to the extent that it permeates, transforms, controls and moulds the whole of personality. The higher one's realization of it, the

1. Cf. Sir John Woodroffe: *Sakti and Sakta*, Ganesh and Co, Madras, 1959. In fact he has contributed a number of works on this theme through translation of about twenty Tantric texts. *The Serpent Power*, *The Great Liberation*, *Principles of Tantra* and so on.

greater will be his power. As a matter of fact, every kind of wisdom brings to its possessor its specific power and this is the result of the mastery of the respective skills of doctor, carpenter, priest or philosopher — yogi.

A philosopher in the Indian tradition, is one who has transcended the illusions of wishful thinking and the normal dualities of life, thus attaining to a higher state of being pervaded by the magic power of truth. Because of this factor, perhaps, wisdom in the Orient is guarded jealously and communicated only to those capable of attaining it. The term *adhikārin* as adjective literally means 'entitled to', 'having a right to', 'possessed of authority', 'possessed of power', 'qualified' or 'fit for'. And as noun it means 'owner, master, director, rightful claimant, a personage qualified to perform some sacrifice or holy work'.

Thirdly, the power of truth (*Satya*) is celebrated in numerous stories and legends. One who performs an 'act of truth', one who has enacted his own dharma throughout his life is endowed with a power that amounts to working miracles such as making the Ganga flow upstream, removing the poison from the snake-bitten boy seemingly dead and so on². The term denoting truth *satya* is quite enriching in its implications for the study of 'power'. *Sat-ya* means 'is-ness'. The Sanskrit *sat* is the present participle of the root *as*, 'to be, to exist, to live' etc. *Sat* literally means 'being, existing, existent', and also 'true, essential, real'. With regard to human beings *sat* means 'good, virtuous, chaste, worthy, respectable, wise, learned'. As neuter noun it means 'that which really exists, the really existent truth, Brahman, the Holy Power, the Supreme Self'³.

2. Heinrich Zimmer: *Philosophies of India*. Ed. by Joseph Campbell. Meridian Book, New York, 1956, pp. 162-166. Cf. also John E. Mitchiner. *Traditions of the Seven Rsis*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1982, pp. 206-217. Where the powers of the Ascetic are described both creative and destructive.

Cf. J Abbott: *The Keys of Power*. A study of Indian Ritual and Belief. Methuen and Co, London, 1932. He records many customs and practices to show how far the concept of a supernatural cosmic power dominates popular practice.

3. H. Zimmer. Cited above. p. 166-167.

What is significant for us here is that being is truth and holding on to truth (*satyāgraha*) is power. In this context when the power of truth is spoken, it is referring to existence as the most universal and primordial form of power.

Fourthly power as brutal force is referred to by other terms and in fact *matsya-nyaya* — ‘the principle of the fish’ is well known where the oppression of the weak by the strong is the law. This law of the fish is opposed to the law of spiritual mastery. Might wins and might makes right and different kinds of might are admitted but the mightiest of all is that of the Holy Power.

The power of truth, *satyāgraha*, *ahimsa* is on a different plane altogether and this lifts the great saints and yogis out of the range of normal human behaviour. This power is acknowledged by kings and rulers of the Indian tradition and that is why a sage is respected and listened to by the emperors themselves: It is a common belief in the Indian tradition that the unrighteousness even when it is of great proportion is incapable of overcoming righteousness which is always protected by Time⁴.

2. The concept of power in the Bhagavadgita

In our reflection here, we shall restrict ourselves to the text of the Bhagavadgita in order to understand the concept of power. Though limited in scope such an approach avoids any sweeping generalisation about Hindu traditions. The Gita being a basic text accepted by almost all the Hindu traditions, one can present this analysis as a representative understanding of power, though interpretations may vary, and that is understandable.

2. 1. Lord Kṛṣṇa Lord of Power (*Yogeśvara*)

In the Gita Lord Kṛṣṇa proclaims Himself as the Lord of power and might and Arjuna praises Him as Lord of infinite power and valour who pervades the whole universe.

9, 5. “Behold my sovereign activity” (*yogam aiśvaram*)

11,40. “All hail to you, the All. How infinite your strength, how limitless your powers! All things you bring to

4. Mahabharata 13. 164. 7

their consummation: hence you are All (*ananta-viry amita-vikramastvam*).

Lord Krsna speaks of his power and might in terms of his activities. The terms 'yoga' as in *yogesvara* 'the Lord of creative power' refers to the way the power is manifested. Sometimes the phrase used is *vibhutim yogam ca*, his sovereignty and the way it is skillfully used. In other words power of the Lord is manifested in sustaining all that exists. The nature of His power is explained in terms of its function. The whole activity of God, the *dharma* of the Lord here is to hold-everything-in-existence, to bear allowing-it-to-be (cf.15, 17; 9, 4-5; 7,7 etc.)

Such verses in the Gita illustrate how the power of the Lord is operative in holding the universe together, sustaining and supporting. In different ways it is shown that nothing can exist without the Lord. He is the beginning, the middle and the end. Here it is interesting to note that the power of the Lord is nothing but the vibrant presence of the Lord, the indwelling presence in every being and becoming. His presence is power as it determines the being of the other, controls, preserves and governs. Without this underlying power nothing can exist. So He is the Lord of bein

2. 2. All powers proceed from the Lord

Another significant aspect of power that is revealed in the Gita is that whatever power, glory, strength, is seen in the world, it is all a reflection of His power (*vibhuti*), sovereignty (*yoga*), glory (*tejas*) and might (*virya*). So power basically is God's attribute and it is divine. This divine power is manifested in different ways and forms. This is repeatedly stressed in various contexts like the following: 'The splendour centred in the sun which bathes the whole world in light, [the splendour] in the moon and fire - know that it is mine. [thus] too I penetrate the earth and so sustain [all] beings with my strength; becoming [the moon-plant] Soma, I, the very sap [of life], cause all healing herbs to grow 15, 12-13.

Such texts highlight a number of theologically significant points. There is no power on earth unless it is given

from above. The Lord is the source of power and when men display power in any sense of the term it is a reflection of the glory of the Lord. It is a gift. Secondly, in this world-view which is cosmic there is an underlying unity, an inner coherence; everything is held together by an inner force, like a thread that links the pearls, as a garland, like an organism — a body or a tree — harmoniously sustaining and supporting its various limbs. Everything is inter-connected and inter-dependent. Thirdly, the ontology of this reality becomes evident. What is seen as powerful, beautiful, noble and good is only a fragment of greater totality. A true ontology is what makes us aware of Being — the wholeness. It is only in the light of this wholeness, against the background of Being, other beings or entities become meaningful and significant. If an entity — a tree or a flower, sun or moon — attracts us, draws our attention thus making a demand on us, it is because of the wholeness against which we perceive these entities.

Hence the mystery of the *vibhūtiyoga* of the Gītā takes us to the realm of wholeness. The Gita is explicitly telling us that what we perceive and experience is only a part of the greater whole. What is manifested serves as a pointer to the wholeness and totality of reality. It is a call to look beyond and a reminder not to absolutize the part. What is seen is possible only when the totality is presupposed. Hence everything that is manifested becomes a symbol evoking further horizons of reality and taking us to its depth dimension.

2.3. Purpose of power is the cosmic welfare

The power of the Lord is meant for the good of all beings. It is to maintain the harmony and cosmic welfare that the Lord is at work. He does not have to act for fulfilling any personal need but still His power is dynamically present for the preservation of all beings. If He does not act, there will be chaos. That is the dharma of the Lord, as the Gita insists, to hold the universe in existence. In fact his taking birth — *avatara* — is for the good of all beings: to protect the good, to destroy the wicked and to establish righteousness (4, 8).

Lord Kṛṣṇa sets Himself as model for others to be engaged in action without attachment with the sole purpose of

Lokasangraha. A wise man should act for the cosmic welfare, ordering of the human society. The Lord being the model, His power being at the service and good of all beings, a right attitude to power is inculcated thereby and an orientation is given to others regarding power. The invitation of the Lord to imitate Him in desireless action, working for the cosmic welfare hints at the relation between being and power. In fact a wise man reaches his integration, realises his own identity of what he really is in essence in so far as he takes delight in the well-being of all things. A wise man, a saint or an ideal man according to the Gita is one who delights in the welfare of all beings. The phrase: *Sarvabhutahite ratah* (5, 25 and 12, 4) would mean that men are to achieve their realisation by delighting in the welfare of all beings and they could reach that state of realisation in so far as they delight in the welfare of all beings. That would be being true to one's nature (*Svabhava*) and sharing in the nature of all beings; excluding *ahamkara* in the language of the Gita means being in consonance with the welfare of the whole.

2.4. To acknowledge the underlying power of the Lord is salvation for man

If the *dharma* of the Lord is to hold the universe, the *dharma* of man is to allow himself to be held by the Lord.

"Whosoever should know this my far-flung power and how I use it [whosoever should know these] as they really are, is [truly] integrated; and this his integration can never be undone. Herein there is no doubt." (10,7)

What liberates man is the right perspective of the reality in and around him: namely, that everything is interconnected and that he has a part to play in the cosmic scene and the Lord's power is what gives coherence, unity and harmony. When this truth is realized, aware of the power that is at work, he gets a clear vision of what he is and what he should do. It is such an orientation that is needed for his freedom of mind and heart. Only then will he be an integrated person — integrated within himself — mind and senses acting accordingly — and integrated with the society of men and the whole universe. And that is salvation for him. That is why a contemplation of the powers (*vibhutis*) of the Lord and the medita-

tion on the divine activities such as the *avataras*, His birth, and all the manifestations connected with them, are said to be liberative factors — means of attaining salvation.

3. Implications of this theological framework

After trying to understand what the Gita has to say on the concept of power — its meaning as divine presence, its various forms of manifestation and the underlying unity — the wholeness that holds together, one may reflect on the theological implications of such an understanding of power. If 'power' is understood as the immanent divine power or the indwelling of the Absolute in all that exists, all that has being, the task of theology becomes one of making thematic what is implicit in the basic proclamations of the Scripture. — When the encounter with this mystery of the Lord's power (*vibhuti*) takes place, one cannot remain neutral and unaffected. This encounter takes hold of the individual as if invaded by the Absolute, resulting in a total transformation. Such a state of transformation is tested by the surrender of the person to the mystery, ready to be at the disposal of the Lord, as it happens in the case of Arjuna of the Gita. Taken hold of by the Lord, the devotee relativises everything else — security, wealth or fame. Theology of power would then mean articulating the various dimensions of this encounter with the divine presence — how the power is manifested (*vibhuti*) and how it is used by the Lord (*yoga*).

3. 1 Existential dimension

The encounter of the individual with the divine presence is given expression in the Gita, and this insight has to be understood in today's existential situation. Gandhi's concern for the people and his involvement with the contemporary socio-political situation of India made him perceive the *existential dimension* of his understanding of the Gita. He took his inspiration from the message of the Gita and also found support in the Gita itself for his existential interpretation. He finds that the meaning of the concept of sacrifice in the Gita is not animal sacrifice but physical labour for service. So too is the term *sannyasa*. It does not mean complete cessation of all activity but it is "all work and yet no

work" — that is, work, with detachment. He finds support from the Gita for his understanding of *Ahimsa*. One is bound to follow Truth and *Ahimsa* in order to practice the central teaching of the Gita. 'But it may be freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish *ahimsa*. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the Gita age. The Gita had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit... When the Gita was written, although people believed in *ahimsa*, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *ahimsa*'⁵.

Gandhi has not commented on the *vibhuti yoga* of the Gita nor has he articulated the theological implications of the *vibhutis* and *yoga* in this context. He is aware of the power of God underlying all existing things. "The sovereign power of God lies in this mystery, this miracle, that all beings are in Him and yet not in Him, He in them and yet not in them. This is the description of God in the language of mortal man."⁶ This is Gandhi's way of expressing the divine presence in the world. This faith enables him to experiment with truth — trying to be faithful to the power of truth that is operative in the world and by holding on to that power he could overcome any hurdle on the way to his realisation. He is convinced that the spiritual power will succeed at last.

Holding on to this conviction cost him a lot. But he could conquer even the hard-hearted enemies with his *ahimsa*. "Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will... We in India may in a moment realize that one hundred thousand Englishmen need not frighten three hundred million human beings. A definite forgiveness would, therefore, mean a definite recognition of our strength."⁷

Based on the principle of *ahimsa* Gandhi suggests that aggression is the path to mastery of those without self-control, non-violent resistance the path of those with control. Gandhi could translate his faith in spiritual power into action in the socio-political context of his time. He could bear witness to this power in himself and in his dealings with his fellow-man.

5. M. Gandhi: 'Anasaktiyoga'. In. *The Gita according to Gandhi* by Mahadeva Desai. Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1946, pp. 132-133

6. Ibid. p. 267.

7. *Young India*. Aug. 11, 1920.

He could suffer in order to gain spiritually. He had the vision of a liberated society based on a spiritual communion. "God is present in all of us. For my part, every moment I experience the truth that, though many, we are all one." So he could work for the "welfare of all" (*sarvodaya*). In other words Gandhi offers us a way of living the mystery of God's indwelling by discovering its existential dimension.

3.2. Social dimension

If the mystery of God's power is manifested in different forms in all being and becoming, and salvation for man consists in recognising the immanent divine power in the world which itself is only a fragment of the divine glory, then one's faith in such a mystery should lead him to acknowledge this power being present in the day-to-day events and occurrences, not merely in the historical persons who played a vital role in the country but in the millions of India's children. The Lord who said that "I am the flavour in the water, I am the light in the sun and moon, in men I am their manliness (Gita 7,8) means to say also that "I am the power that sustains the struggle of the peasants", "I am the ray of hope that beams across the faces of the millions in hopeless situation". He should "be there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones", "with them in sun and in shower, his garments covered with dust" (Tagore).

The text of the Gita explicitly states that the *vibhūtis* (manifestations of God's sovereignty) cited there should serve only as examples and by no means to be taken as only symbols of His presence. So it would be going against the spirit of the text if someone were to deny this dimension of the mystery. It is left to the believers in this world-view to spell out the further implications of this mystery in all its dimensions.

3.3. The cosmic dimension

The Lord of the winds and storms, the Lord who sustains the movements of the sun and moon and stars, is also highlighting the cosmic dimension of the divine encounter. It is a call to recognise the divine power that is at work. It is part of the process of one's realisation to perceive the underlying unity which is salvific for man. The whole universe is mediating the divine presence. The things are not to be ignored as of

no consequence in our life. The wholeness implies that our togetherness in society is mediated through things. They are the vehicles of our coming-together. If nature and the universe manifest the glory of the Lord, the products of human efforts and the creations of mankind also radiate the beauty of the Lord. What is beautiful and what is aesthetically elevating is a converging point of the human transcendence into the divine. When this is taken in the spirit of the divine indwelling (God's immanence), then we can understand and appreciate better our ancient tradition of giving reverence and respect for the mother earth and all the elements of the universe. In fact it is significant that the Gita refers to the aesthetic dimension of his *vibhūtis* that Kṛṣṇa is the Lord of poetry, music and beauty (cf. 7, 10; 10, 22-41).

The Indian tradition has accorded a significant place for aesthetics calling it the fifth Veda. Without identifying theology with aesthetics the Indian thinkers placed the aesthetic experience and mystical experience in an *alaukika* realm – transcendental or apperceptive level. *Rasasvada* (aesthetic experience) and *brahmasvada* (mystic experience) are said to be *saha-udara* (of the same womb)⁸. And in our context God's immanence as the reflection of His glory and power offers us an opportunity to see the fusion of these two horizons – namely the human transcendence and God's indwelling in the universe.

Based on the Gita understanding of power as the immanent divine presence in all beings and becomings, one can discover and articulate more dimensions than what is presented here. This presentation though sketchy could evoke further reflection towards a theology of power based on Indian sources.

8. Cf. Anand Amaladass, *Philosophical Implications of Dhvani*. Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, Vienna, 1984. pp. 179 ff.

Power in the Bible

"All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Mt 28:18) "The rulers of the nations exercise power over them. Let it not be so among you." (Mt 20:25)

Jesus claims power but, almost in the same breath, he warns against power. Is there ambiguity in his teaching? Does he deny others what he professes to hold? Or is the ambiguity in power itself? Is there power and power? The problem is important. It is a matter not just of clarifying a biblical concept but of casting the light of the Scriptures on a basic human predicament.

I. The Old Testament: Kingship and Tyranny

Solomon lived in days of peace... How wise you became in your youth... Your name reached to far off islands and you were loved for your peace... But you laid your loins with women... You put a stain upon your honour so that you brought wrath upon your children... so that sovereignty was divided.

This rapid survey of Solomon's career by the Siracid (47: 13-21) expresses well the ambiguity of Solomon's reign, climax of Israel's glory and at the same time starting point of its decadence that was to lead ultimately to the fall and destruction of Jerusalem in 587. In his moralizing manner, Sirach seems to make of Solomon's sin a matter of lust. The historical books cast another light on the matter. Solomon's problem was the very power his "wisdom" gave him. Indeed the reign of Solomon is a typical illustration of the splendours and risks of human power.

"Solomon in all his glory" says Jesus, summarizing in a few words the remembrance left by the most prestigious king of the Old Testament (Mt 6:29). Solomon represents the

zenith of Israelite kingship. His reign was the only time in history when Israel took the dimensions of an Empire. The Books of Kings describe at length the administrative skill ('wisdom') of the emperor (1 Kg 3:1-5:14), his achievements in the field of public works (5:15-9:25), his economic success and foreign influence (9:26-10:29). Subsequent tradition will ascribe to him a good part of Wisdom literature and the love lyrics that make the Song of Songs.

But this glorious saga of imperial power gets an ominous conclusion in the final chapter of the story that lays bare the failings of the reign and the signs of decay that began to appear inside and outside the Empire (1 Kg 11). The stress is first put on the king's very large number of wives and concubines mostly foreigners coming from the surrounding countries.

The harem played its role in the international power game of the Levantine countries. And since politics and religion were very much intertwined in the Ancient Near East, those conjugal alliances paved the way for religious syncretism (1 Kg 11:4-8). Political *hybris* led to religious hybridism. Both were soon to eat into the vitals of the Hebrew theocratic State.

This is the analysis proposed in conclusion by the Deuteronomistic compiler of Solomon's story. This ambiguous balance sheet of the great monarch's reign is typical of the whole story of the Hebrew kings narrated in the Bible. On the one hand, they were anointed with the Spirit "to give justice to the poor... uprightly defend the poorest and save the children of those in need" (Ps 72:2,4). The king was expected to "free the poor man calling to him and those in need of help, to have pity on the poor and the feeble and redeem their lives from exploitation and outrage" (Ps 72:12).

In short the king was anointed to represent God's preferential love for the poor. He was a saviour (2 Kg 13:5; 6:26). But actually this ideal was rarely realised. Barring a few exceptions, the story of the Israelite kings is punctuated with the sad refrain: "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord." This 'evil' could be downright idolatry or at least the infringement of the law of the unique sanctuary. But

it could also be injustice to the poor, "exploitation and outrage".

Such had already been the case with David. David was the national hero, the head of the dynasty, "the man who was raised on high, the messiah of the God of Jacob, the singer of the songs of Israel (2 Sam 23:2). He never indulged in idolatry. Yet the Bible records two serious misdeeds of the king and both are abuses of power. The one is the well known story of Bathsheba, Uriah's wife (2 Sam 11), the other the less known experience of the census (2 Sam 24:1-25). After operating the census, David had to acknowledge that it was a "great sin" (2 Sam 24:10). Again it was the sin of *hybris*, of vaunting one's power. The antimonarchical trend underlying the biblical account reacted against the increased control of people's life which the proposed census allowed. It is interesting to note that one of the main sins the Hebrew tradition held against David was that of bureaucracy.

The Deuteronomistic history of the kings from David to the Exile, passing through Solomon and Ahab, embodies therefore a reflection on the significance of power. Authority is needed in human society: it is given by God unto "salvation" as means of redress in favour of the poor. But it carries in itself its original sin of *hybris*. That such glorious figures as David and Solomon could not escape the temptation shows how deeply rooted it is in man's heart and in human institutions.

This insight is generalised in the reflexion on human condition that underlies the first chapters of Genesis. Man is created in God's image and likeness (Gn 1:26-27). God's 'image and likeness' is a participation in God's power. Being the image of God, man is deputed to 'fill the earth and subdue it' and to exercise dominion over the fish of the sea.

But here also there would be the sin of *hybris*. Man would abuse his power. His dominion was not to be tyrannical, absolute. It has limits: "You may eat freely of every tree in the garden but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen 2:16-17). It is difficult to identify the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and its symbolism.

What is clear is that a limit has been put to man's right to dispose of things. There is a mystery to be respected lest man dies. But man failed to respect this mystery; he wanted total mastership. What the kings had done in the political field, man, as such, does at the wider ecological level. He puts a claim of universal use and abuse, of total license to dispose at his own whim. Power becomes tyranny when God's rule is broken. The present ecological crisis has led to a better awareness that the ultimate temptation of power is its exercise without respect for those over whom it is exercised. Bhopal is a tragic but eloquent comment on Gen 2:17: "You shall die". Power that knows no respect and no mystery smothers and kills. This is equally true for kings and techniques, for countries and nature, in politics and ecology¹.

II. Safeguards

Thus traumatized by a long history of abuse of power, Israel tried to work out safeguards that would keep power in check.

1. A charter of kingship

Israel's tradition was deeply democratic. Its people had been formed in the crucible of the Egyptian slavery. They had discovered their identity by suffering from the oppression of the Pharaoh and had set themselves in reaction against it². It is no surprise that a people thus constituted, nourished strong misgivings towards any form of authority and tended not only towards democracy but even towards anarchy.

This anarchical political *laissez faire* led to the disastrous consequences narrated in the book of Judges. In spite of this calamitous experience, Israel accepted monarchy only with the greatest reluctance. Abimelech's three years reign ended

1. Cf. M. A. Mathias, "The Bible, Ecology and Environment", *Indian Theological Studies* 22 (1983), pp. 5-27.

2. The history of the formation of Israel is more complex and the Yahwist ideology may be more fundamentally the expression of a reaction against exploitation and oppression if we accept N. K. Gottwald's reconstitution of the origins of Israel in *The Tribes of Yahweh. A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B. C. E.*, New York, 1979.

miserably for want of support from his own people (Jud 9). Before giving ultimate caution to the royal institution, Samuel expressed strong reservations (1 Sam 8:5-18). When he anointed Saul as king, he "explained to the people the law of royalty and wrote it in a book which he placed in the presence of the Lord (in the Temple)" (1 Sam 10:25). There is no question of an absolute monarchy. The king's privileges and duties are spelled out in a charter which is submitted to the people and placed under divine custody. It does not matter whether this is strictly historical or not; it might well be redactional comment of the deuteronomistic author. But it shows the *Magna Carla* mentality which characterized Israel's attitude towards power. Let us also take note of the two guarantees of this charter: democratic transparency to people ("he explained it to the people") and the divine guarantee to which we shall soon return ("he placed it in the presence of the Lord").

The book of Deuteronomy gives some of the main elements of this charter in ch. 17: "When you come to the land which the Lord your God gives you and you possess it and dwell in it and then say: 'I will set a king over me, like all nations that are around me'; you may indeed set as king over you him whom the Lord your God will choose. One among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother. Only he must not multiply horses since the Lord has said to you: 'You shall never return that way again.' And he shall not multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply for himself, silver and gold. And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law from that which is in charge of the Levitical priests; and it shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life... that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren and that he may not turn aside from the commandment" (Dt 17:14-20). This interesting text calls for a few comments.

1) It is situated in a context which formulates also rules for judges (17:8-13), levites (18:1-8), prophets (18:9-22). Royal authority is to be exercised in conjunction with the other types of power and so has its limits. Royal, judicial, priestly and prophetic zones of influence *balance and control one another*.

2) The interdiction of foreign interference in appointing a king is no mere xenophobia (vv. 15f). Foreign marriage or marriages contracted under foreign pressure were likely to bring in *foreign conceptions of royal monarchism*. Only a king 'chosen by the Lord' (v. 15) would keep to the covenantal contract and find in this awareness an antidote to royal hegemonistic arrogance.

3) For Dt, the signs of "Solomon's glory" such as a strong cavalry, an impressive harem, a rich treasury of gold and silver, became signs of the corruption that the king is to shun carefully. Taking the whole Deuteronomistic composition and indeed the entire Bible in its totality, it is interesting to note that the very same writings that extol the glory of Solomon see also in that glory an evil symbol. There can be no better comment on *the ambiguity of power* or of the unavoidable temptation of oppression inherent in the exercise of power.

4) To ward off this temptation, the king is requested to write by himself a copy of the law and to read of it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord and to observe all the words of the Lord (Dt 17:20). The 'law of the Lord', at any rate, will keep royal power in its place. The 'good pleasure of the king' cannot be the ultimate criterion of what can be done and not done. More recent experiments in atheistic authority have too sadly justified the biblical warnings.

5) It is very doubtful if the kings actually took time to write and read the Law. But the basic underlying issue is whether any regulation — or any exhortation — is sufficient to save mankind from its evils.

2. Another thorah on kingship

After the collapse of kingship in 587 BC, another attempt to keep in check royal absolutism was proposed by the prophet Ezechiel. It is part of what is called the "*thorah* of Ezechiel" (Ez 40-48), the blue print outlined by the prophet for a renewed Israel, risen from the dry bones of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Exile. The background of this blue print remains the dismal image of kingship during the period of the

First Temple. Ezechiel was a priest and the solution he proposed was typically sacerdotal, or even clerical.

Being a Southerner, Ezechiel could not imagine a future for Israel without a Davidic descendant (Ez 34:23). But the ruler is to be demoted to a lower rank; he will no longer be called king but prince (*nasih*) (34:24). If he keeps a special place allotted to him in the Temple (44:1-3), he is also expected to queue along with the common people in approaching the altar (46:10). His territory will be situated on the outskirts of the holy city, both east and west of it but well outside the 8 miles square assigned to the city itself (45:7-8). Royal power is kept at arm's length and it is a very long arm at that, concluding with the wry comment: "So my princes shall no more oppress my people; but they shall let the house of Israel have the land according to their tribes. . . This is enough for you, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression; stop evicting my people from their land" (45:8-9). It is as if power could not be exercised without oppression, exactions and land grabbing!

Ezechiel's solution was to transfer power from the Palace to the Temple. In Ezechiel's *thorah* land assigned to Priests was four times more than that of the laity, the best part of the first fruits would go to them 45:1-6; 44:29), they would be teachers (44:23) and judges (44:24). But that is where the shoe pinched. Was there any guarantee that the priests would be less greedy and less arrogant than the kings? It was no solution. History has amply demonstrated that papocaesarism is no better than caesaropapism.

The *thorah* of Ezechiel was never actually put into practice. In the history of Israel, the only hierocracy that saw the day was that of the Maccabees which quickly foundered in the quagmire of the Hasmonean infighting and in the corruption of high priesthood that went on till the time of Jesus. Priestcraft has no guarantee of freedom from the temptations of power. And in human history in general, shifts of power from a group to another have meant only shifts of centre of oppression.

III. Jesus

Jesus' appearance was on a background of the failure of

kingship and priesthood. Kingship had collapsed at the time of the Babylonian exile in 587 and the Davidic dynasty was never restored. The rule of Herod and of the Romans could only dramatize, by contrast, the disappearance of the Davidic lineage. The glory of the Maccabean freedom fighters was as short-lived as that of Solomon. It was succeeded by the Hasmonean corruption which provoked an "anti-clerical" repulsion. The disasters of 70 precipitated what was already brewing in this disaffection towards kingship and priesthood. After 70, except for the brief period of the Second Jewish Revolt, Israel is not going to raise up again royalty and sacerdotacy. Authority will shift to the Book and its specialists, the Rabbis.

1. Jesus and power

We must therefore qualify the common statement that Israel expected the coming of a Messiah and that Jesus came to fulfil that expectation.

Jesus never claimed for himself the title of Messiah³. When somebody gives him that title, as for instance in Mk 8:29 and par., his answer is such as to reverse the significance of the title: "he began to teach them that the Son of Man should suffer and be rejected" (Mk 8:31). Still less did he claim priestly messiahship: he was not born of the tribe of Levi and his life and ministry were situated far from the Temple of Jerusalem.

Indeed Jesus' origins, life style, ministry and attitudes projected the opposite of the image of power and authority which royal or priestly messiahship implied. Galilea and not Judea, Nazareth or the shores of the Lake and not Jerusalem: the locale of his action situates him far away from the centres of power. The poor and the people of the land and not the court of Herod or the Sanhedrin: he addressed himself to the nobodies of Israelite society. nay, he associated with lepers, sinners and publicans and not with the scribes and the pharisees: he discarded even the moral influence of the righteous. His companions were fishermen of the Lake, tax collectors and not the courageous Zealots who dared to stand for freedom nor the saintly Essenes with their uncompromising faith.

3. Except Jn 4:26 which is probably a Johannine interpretation.

Jesus seems to have turned down any form of power and might, political, sociological and even moral. This is well illustrated in the Temptation story. Changing stones into bread (Mt 4:3-4) evokes the power of magic, a very influential form of power in the world of those days and even of today, or perhaps the economic power, the influence acquired by 'delivering the goods', the hold of consumerism, the glamour of the modern tempter of the supermarkets. Jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple (Mt 4:5-7) and appearing to the worshipping crowds in the apotheosis of an angelic retinue suggests the power of religion, the hold on people obtained by tapping their religious aspirations. The ultimate temptation is of power in its naked form, the epitome of all temptations, the control of the whole world but at the cost of a total surrender of any divine and human value.

The three temptations dramatize the basic issue of messianism which means triumph, victory, power. But which triumph of which power? The Messiah was expected to embody the triumph of God's rule over evil. A beautiful programme indeed but fraught with the ambiguities inherent in the concepts of "king", "triumph" and "rule". If the rule of the Messiah meant just a shift of the power structure, Jesus' ministry would have led to another Davidic impasse, another priestly Hasmonean fiasco.

The entire ministry of Jesus will continue that stand towards power. It has often been remarked that, by embodying God's preferential option to the poor, Jesus challenged the power structure of human society. In what he said, did and was, Jesus represented an upsetting of human social and political values and priorities. He was son of David but he was from Nazareth, a messianically insignificant village from the North; the setting of his action was not a palace but the village workshop and the stony paths of Galilee; his retinue was not made of angels, important officials and portly officers but of fishermen, women and children. He was the son of God but he preferred the company of sinners and not of the righteous, of 'the people of the land' and not of the religious elite. All this is well known and need not be further expatiated.

2. Antipower ?

Jesus' messianic policies represented therefore an anti-power stance. But we must see in which way exactly this antipower attitude functioned.

Jesus' anti-power stance did not mean that he opposed this or that form of power. 'Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar' (Mt 22:21). The views according to which Jesus would have been a Zealot remain adventurous reconstructions of the evidence.

'Go and show yourself to the priests and give the offering which Moses has prescribed' (Mt 8:4 par.; cf Lk 17:14). If Jesus cleansed the Temple, he did not destroy it nor proposed to do it. He did not set about putting down the influence of priestcraft. A certain aggressive interpretation of Jesus' attitude towards Judaism smacks more of traditional anti-semitism than of genuine liberation concern.

Jesus' attitude towards power goes beyond a mere shift of power. It is more radical. But neither is it the anarchist utopy dreaming of a lawless society and denying the validity of any form of power. The word *exousia* (power, authority) occurs 44 times in the Gospels. Contexts and meanings differ but this frequency would hardly befit the teachings of an anarchist. In Mt 8:9 (cf. Lk 7:8), the word refers specifically to the secular authority of a military commander and Jesus accepts the validity of the analogy proposed by the Roman officer. In the discussion with Pilate, the governor's claim to authority is not denied but Jesus invites Pilate to view his power as depending on divine authority (Jn 19:10-11).

The antipower stance of Jesus is rather a *subversion of the very nature of power*. The Messiah becomes a Servant. Power is no longer domination but service.

Of all the messianic texts of the Old Testament, it was the Servant typology that was least ridden with triumphalistic ambiguities. Allusions to the Servant theme are frequent in the Gospels (Mt 3:17; 8:17; 11:5; 12:18-21; 16:21; 17:5; 20:18-28; 23:24 and par). Even if Jesus did not apply the title of Servant to himself explicitly, overtones of the theme can be

perceived all along the Gospels. Jesus' utterances, his life and his death echo this Servant consciousness. "In the usage of Jesus the influence of the Servant conception is adjectival; it is the undertone of his teaching concerning his messianic suffering."⁴ He is the Son of God, the Messiah, the Son of Man but as a Servant. He has authority but this *exousia* is exercised not to oppress, to control or to punish but to liberate (Lk 4:18), to heal (Mk 1:27; Lk 6:19), to teach and guide (Mt 7:29) and to forgive (Mk 2:10). Three texts express this reversal of power in a very apt manner:

One: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him." (Mt 11:27) This text has been preceded by a revolutionary thanksgiving to God for having "hidden these things from the wise and the learned and revealed them to the little ones". It is the upheaval of the hierarchy of learning and of religious consideration, the reversal of the values that make an élite. From this subversion of knowledge, will follow a corresponding upheaval in power. As access to "knowledge" is thrown open to "children", the weak and the outcastes are invited to become the associates of Christ's transformed power: "Come to me all who labour and are heavily laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and become my disciples." (11:28-29) The disciple shares in "all the things" which have been handed over to the Son, that is he shares in His knowledge and his power (cf. Mt 28:18). He will be given a share in Christ's rule (Mt 19:28). The "yoke" of this rule is not the yoke of the Law but of love and this is why the yoke is easy and light. "For I am humble and gentle of heart": In Christ, the characteristics of authority become humility and kindness. Both knowledge and power have been revolutionized.

Two: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you but whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be your slave even as the Son of Man did not come to

4. Taylor, *The Name of Jesus*, London, 1957, p. 37.

be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mt 20:25-28) (cf also Mk 10:42-45; Lk 22:25-27) The context of this saying is that of the first power struggle in the community of the disciples: they are wrangling as to who will have the first places in the Kingdom! By shifting the quarrel and the saying to the context of the Last Supper, Luke may suggest that the so-called '*agape-celebrations*' of his times were not free from this kind of tussling among Christian ministers. The ground for those quarrels was that Jesus never envisaged an anarchical community. The Twelve had been chosen to represent the twelve patriarchs of the old Israel. They will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28). But their authority is to undergo the great reversal of the Cross. It is to be a leadership of service unto death. Every genuine Christian reality passes through the crucible of kenotic love. Authority and power have particularly to do so. The perspectives are restricted to the community of the believers: "it shall not be so *among you*": the viewpoint is ecclesial. Jesus' saying does not enter the question of what would happen when, the kings of the nations and the political leadership become "disciples". The problem arose already in the encounter with the rich man (Mt 19:16-22). It will be the object of a special concern in Lk-Acts and in the letter of James (2:1-13; 4:13-5:6). It will remain an important problem of Christian ethics. Jesus did not give all the answers to all the questions. But he set up a community of prophetic witnesses to the new revolutionized conception of authority. This is what the Church is to be. But if the Church returns to the old values of prestige and domination, the salt will have lost its tang (Mt 5:13-14); the dog will have returned to its vomit (2 Pet 2:22); the light will have turned into darkness and what a darkness it will be in the world (Mt 6:23)!

Three: "All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." (Mt 28:18-19) The mission of the Church is made to depend on the assumption of power by the Risen Lord. The 'therefore' that links both parts of the statement is important. Between the 'power' claimed by Christ and the mission to make disciples there seems to be no connection. Yet the connection is there and enlightens both parts of Jesus' declaration. The mission of

the Church has no ground and no power apart from the enthronement of the risen Lord; it is nothing but an actualisation of the power given to the Risen One. Conversely the Lordship of Christ is to be understood in terms of its consequence which is to make disciples. Whereas in Dn 7:14, the enthronement of the Son of Man gave him "dominion, kingdom and kingship that all peoples, nations and languages should *serve* him", in Mt 28:18-19 Jesus receives dominion over heaven and earth that all peoples may be *disciples*. There is a long way from the "dominion" that makes peoples to "serve" and the "authority" that makes "disciples". In the Old Testament text the power is still meant to control and to tame; in the context of Jesus' ministry and universal lordship, the power is given to bring into discipleship, that is friendship, intimacy, complete sharing of all the knowledge and intimate participation in all the privileges of the Master. If dominion made slaves, discipleship makes friends (Jn 15:15) and leads into truth and freedom. "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples; you will know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (Jn 8:31-32) This is the "power" Christ claimed and the power he bequeathed to his Church.

Conclusion

It was an awesome gift God made to humankind when He created them in his own image and likeness and gave them a share in his knowledge and power. Inherent to this power was the temptation of *hybris*, of arrogant domination and brute control. The image of the Creator could be perverted into that of the Destroyer when use became abuse and power turned into oppression.

Jesus was to reveal God as kenotic love. Jesus' life and death were totally transparent to that love and thereby he revolutionized power. He did it when he embodied the power of God's kenotic love, when he went to the poor, the sinners, the outcasts and set them as the typical representatives of the Kingdom, of the new humankind. He did it when he appeared as crucified Messiah, manifesting the power of God and the wisdom of God in an act of foolishness wiser than and of weakness stronger than the humans (1 Cor 1:23-25). Jesus

faced the powers that be, not as an anarchist denying the validity of any authority, nor as a seditious instigator trying to shift the centres of power but as a Saviour, with his new perception of a God whose wisdom looks foolish and whose power appeared in the weakness of a kenotic love.

This could not but be a political stand. In a way, the problem of Christ is eminently a problem of power, of his authority and of the challenge he put to the usual exercise of authority. He did not put the challenge as a moralist proposing a lovely but impractical ideal. He made it an issue of life and death. He lived it out; he died of it. The drama of Calvary in which Jews and Romans, religious and civil authorities were involved, is a constant reminder to all who exercise power that they are handling an issue of life and death for humankind and for the universe.

But Jesus and the Bible remind us also that the political problem of power transcends politics, that it concerns God and belongs to the rule of God. The first commandment shelters the others. Respect of God guarantees against abuse of power, provided the God one believes in is the true God of love and not the Supreme Autocrat. Mysticism alone can rescue politics from abuse of power and tyranny. Without the Yogi, politics fall into the hands of the ruthless Kommissar, said a book by Koestler, and Dostoyevski's Great Inquisitor shows that the Kommissar can as well be a religious figure. In many ways and under many garbs, Jesus and Pilate continue to face each other in human history.

Bangalore

L. Legrand

A Power that Pulls

Reflections on the Church and the Exercise of Power

**"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth
will draw all men to myself." (Jn 12:32)**

The context of our reflections

One may dispute whether the massive poverty characterizing India is on the increase or on the way of being eliminated. However, that the critical consciousness of the people continues to grow and intensify is something beyond a shadow of doubt. The people are progressively realizing the intimate nexus between their misery and the power-structures. Illiterate as they may be, the people are, nevertheless, able to identify and name the powers in the village, district, country etc. that preside over their destinies; they keenly perceive the intrigues and machinations of power.

The Church finding itself right in the midst of the society and having an institutional identity comes increasingly under the close scrutiny of the critically awakened people. It is true – and it must be stated clearly – that the Church is a mystery and as such, in spite of its visible nature, cannot be reduced to the dimensions of sociology. There is much more to the Church than what appears. And yet, it is a fact that, for many, the strongest temptation to a sociological reduction of the Church arises from the observation of the way power is exercised in the Church. Invoking the truth that the Church is a mystery as a shield to prevent the critical scrutiny would be, so to say, a supernatural escapism.

Be that as it may, we witness today the recourse on the part of the laity, religious, priests and others to fasting, *dharna* and various forms of boycotting. Without entering into

the question whether these are justified in apportioning blame to one or another, we can say that this is certainly a sign of discontentment about the exercise of power in the Church and these are means employed in order to acquire power which they feel they are deprived of. To reduce these manifestations to a question of obedience would be too simplistic and naïve. Indications are that such practices may increase unless the issue is approached in terms of power-relations in the Church and appropriate solutions are evolved at the structural level.

Finally, we observe that in our villages, towns and cities ever more people and groups are being rendered powerless – socially, politically, economically and culturally. The power they need to conduct a dignified human existence seems to slip through their fingers; and it gets accumulated in groups, structures and institutions that wield it to oppress, exploit and dehumanize them. The situations of power and powerlessness cannot be a matter of indifference to the Church. In any case, as a matter of fact, the Church relates in one way or other to the powers that be. The response to power-structures is intimately interlinked to the way authority is exercised within the Church.

It is in this setting that the following reflections are offered. They focus on a few points, and do not pretend to be comprehensive.

Some clarifications

It is out of the scope of this article to enter into any detailed discussion on the numerous and wide-ranging definitions of power. However, some kind of clarification is in order. In a very basic sense, power can be understood as the capacity or ability to effect change or influence. When this capacity is in nature we speak of natural powers which can be controlled and channelled through science and technology. More importantly, however, power is the capacity that resides in the world of human beings and it manifests itself in individual, in interpersonal relations, in relationship between groups, in institutions etc. At the human level, power is operative in social, political, economic, cultural, religious and other realms. When power expresses itself in spite of resistance we speak of coercion and violence.

Power is something wider than authority. Authority presupposes power. We can speak of authority when power is recognized or legitimized. Such recognition could be on the basis of law, constitution, inheritance, experience, tradition, expertise and so on. These provide the authority — individual or institutional — the right and necessary stability to exercise power.

A second clarification concerns the ambiguous nature of power. On the one hand, power is something positive and human life is unimaginable without it. It is a gift of God which is so very essential for life, for the well-being of man and society. On the other hand, power means also domination, oppression, exploitation, manipulation, death and destruction. In other words, power can be a symbol of all evil and selfishness, individual and collective. Power is a source of temptation; it has a deceptive fascination. Another ambiguity of power is that its evils do not come to cease by the fact that it is legitimized or is exercised in the name of God. The fact that power is exercised by sacred persons or institution does not immunize them against perversities of power. Nay, some of the most in-human expressions of power take place because God and the Sacred are invoked in its support. History and experience amply testify this.

No communion without power

The Church is essentially a communion of persons — fellowship. The rule of God of which the Church is a sacrament is ultimately nothing but the fulness of fellowship, total freedom, wholeness and salvation.

The communion of persons, however, cannot be disconnected from the question of power and its sharing. Fostering the mystery of communion in the life and mission of the Church demands as a necessary natural basis, the right kind of power-relationship within and without the Church. This alone will lend substance and seriousness to the claim of the Church to be a mystery of communion and a sign and instrument of God's Kingdom. One could state, for example, that slaves and masters are truly brothers; men and women are equals; there is basic equality among all believers — laity, clergy etc. Such

statements would be high-sounding but hollow unless they include in their purview the root question of power-relationship between the concerned groups. The statements would be something like saying that in Hinduism there is no caste distinction since Bhagavadgita says that Brahmins and Sudras are equal. And yet, we know that the reality is far from it. It hides the vast difference in the religious, social and economic power possessed by the two groups.

The source of power in the Church is the Spirit. He endows all believers with his power as a gift. The power of leadership bestowed by the Spirit on certain believers and recognized as legitimate authority by the community may not dominate over other forms of power, nor may it neutralize, replace or cancel them. It is the whole Church which is empowered by the Spirit so that each one may grow in love, fellowship and freedom, and bear abundant fruits for the life of the world. Any attempt on the part of the leadership to usurp the power which the Spirit has bestowed on the believers, disregard or cripple it would amount to a sacrilege. When the believers are thus rendered powerless by the leader, communion in the Church which presupposes power, is also profoundly disturbed. The leader will, consequently, become the cause of disunity in the Church.

The power exercised in the Church by all the believers, each one according to his or her calling needs to be regulated and balanced. The lack of this would inevitably lead to the same kind of conflicts, struggles, pressure-tactics, control and manipulation which are conspicuous in the society around us. The ambiguous and unredeemed power needs to be detoxicated and redeemed to exist in the Church as a true gift of the Spirit. Dialogue is the redemption of power from its ambiguities and the evils it is capable of. Dialogue means the convergence of various forces in the Church to serve the goal of communion both within and without the Church. It is also a check-up whether there is any undue concentration of power in the Church, whether there are unhealthy swellings of power in the body of the Church. Unfeigned and sincere dialogue includes sharing of power. An important form of effective dialogue is, then, participation in decision-making to which each believer brings with him or her the power which he or

she has received from the Spirit as a gift and which enjoys a certain authority in so far as this power of the Spirit he or she possesses is recognized by the community.

Power – a condition for freedom

As there can be no communion without sharing in power so too there can be no true freedom in the Church without power in its positive sense. Power is a necessary condition for the realisation of freedom which too, like power, is a gift of the spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom." (1 Cor. 3:17) Imposing servility on others, and fostering immature dependence is against the Spirit of Christian freedom. Therefore, the exercise of power at all levels should be directed to free people and make them mature. The relation among the believers in the Church should be a relationship of adults.

Any paternalism and maternalism in the Church should be carefully avoided since they can turn persons into perpetual infants by stunting their growth. In this context a word must be said about the frequently employed images for power-holders in the Church as 'father', 'mother', 'pastor' etc. In early times, the endearing term 'papa' – father (later evolution from papa to pope) referred to the leader of the local community. This expression was used in an environment of deep communion in the Church and in a mystical sense since the Church leader, reflected the care and concern of the heavenly Father. Now it would be simply incorrect and seriously prejudicial to the freedom of the believers if what was said in the form of an image and in a mystical tone were to be converted into a juridical reality, making the leader of the local Church bear all the powers of a father *vis à vis* his infants. Something similar should be said about our 'mothers' in religious congregations. 'Father' and 'mother' can only be mystical expressions in the Church and on the basis of these appellations no power-holder in the Church should expect from the believers to behave like infants towards him or her. "You are all brethren... And call no man your father on earth, for you have only one Father, and he is in heaven." (Mt 23:8-9)

Similarly the image of pastor in the Johannine sense (Jn 10:11) is meant to underscore the intimate relationship,

the mutual knowledge of the pastor and the sheep. This image in the Church should not be extrapolated and understood as referring to the commanding power represented by the pastor in relation to whom the sheep are mute. Such extrapolated interpretations are dangerous and destructive of freedom in the Church.

It is only an atmosphere of freedom in the Church to think, speak out and act that can make people truly human and Christian, as well as open up new possibilities for the mission of the Church. At this historical juncture of the life of the Church in India a lot more freedom is necessary to encounter the challenges of our situation and respond to them meaningfully and creatively. This atmosphere of freedom must mark the relationship between church-leaders and priests, superiors and religious, parish priests and the laity, and so on. The immature dependence of the religious, specially women-religious, on their superiors, and the laity on the clergy should give place to the freedom of adults which will enable them to be innovative in giving expression to the power and gifts which the Spirit has given them. Since human freedom is not an abstraction but incarnate, structural and other means must be constantly developed for its realization. Service to the freedom of others is an important task of the power-holders in the Church. This is very different from the self-understanding of authority as controller of the freedom of others. Authority which is inspired by the idea of control will be sterile and spread all around a lifeless rigour — *rigor mortis*.

There is, of course, room for fear on the part of a power-holder that freedom could be abused. In this case, he or she should remember that freedom is not the preserve of the authority but the gift of the Spirit. Besides, if freedom is ambiguous and open to abuse, no less ambiguous and open to abuse is the power possessed by the authority in the Church. The presumption that authority is exercised safely and without risks, and freedom is open to danger and risks is wrong as experience clearly shows. Any authority in the Church that does not augment (authority — *auctoritas* — from *augere*, meaning to increase) the freedom and life would undermine its own *raison d'être*

Power and pluralism – antithetical?

Pluralism is another issue of great importance in the exercise of power in the Church. Power should be oriented towards the creation of ever greater spaces of freedom the realization of which will bring in its wake pluralism. But unfortunately the exercise of power in the Church tends to centralization, creation of monolithic unity and conformism. Historically there have been several reasons for this. One reason was the absorption into the Church the political models of unity. The danger and threats represented by heresis, schism etc. to which the Church often responded with a narrow understanding of unity, was yet another reason. This contributed to overplaying the role of authority in the Church as the guardian of unity and in this process left in oblivion the equally important duty of the authority to foster pluralism. Today the organizational patterns, bureaucracy etc. are contributing to the reinforcing of centralization at all levels.

The theological inspiration behind the monolithic model of unity is the image of the almighty God as one. As God is one so too in all realms of life – political, social, ecclesiastical, everything should be reduced to one. The political history of the west amply testifies how easily the one almighty God could be invoked to legitimize the sovereignty of emperors, kings, dictators, absolute states and every kind of authoritarian rule. Plurality is frowned upon as a threat to power as well as to unity. But we know this kind of monotheism is not christian and it should not be the model for the unity of the Church. Christian image of God is triune. There can be no real unity which is not at the same time also plurality, diversity. God's power is experienced in the rich and variegated forms of his creation. It is the reflection of his one mystery as plural, trinitarian. At a time when totalitarian trends are on the increase in modern life and centralization is becoming a great temptation to the Church, it is necessary for all office-holders in the Church to be inspired by the Trinitarian mystery in their attitude and practice.

True strength of the Church, parish, diocese, religious congregation does not lie simply in organizational unity. Monolithic unity and centralization are prone to bring out some

of the most baneful evil power is capable of. In its attempt to bring about a monolithic unity, authority can level down the pluriform gifts of God, their beauty and splendour, and make everything plain like the stretch of sand in the desert. Pluralism, like the dialogue, is a very necessary means to redeem power from its ambiguities. The genuineness of authority is tested by its ability to promote and foster pluralism in all areas of the life and mission of the Church. Unity is to be sought fundamentally in faith and witness to it and not in conformism, bureaucracy and centralization.

Rootage of power in truth and the lie of all dominations

For power to serve communion, freedom and pluralism, rootedness in truth is necessary. Authority seeks the conformity of the will of the subject to itself, its policies, decision and decrees. In the eyes of many, the exercise of authority consists precisely in the bending of the will of the subject to the goals determined by it.

It should be, however, noted that, besides this relationship of the will to authority, there is another important aspect, namely the relationship of authority to truth. This aspect is often left out of consideration, and even a deliberate dissociation of the two is made. For, truth turns out to be uncomfortable and even dangerous to power. This is because, truth is the guardian of freedom. Precisely because of this, power tries to murder truth and create darkness so that it can hijack the will and freedom to where it wants. This explains why the autocratic exercise of power, tyranny, totalitarianism, dictatorship etc. require the support of lie and untruth. The penchant of the autocrat to flattery and adulation by a small group of courtiers is nothing but the expression of a situation in which he has enthroned his own whims and fancies in the place of truth and begins to take his own echo as the voice of truth.

It is absolutely necessary that the exercise of power in the Church be enlightened by truth and follow its path. Power needs to be purified by truth. In the concrete, the relationship between authority in the Church and the subjects should be such that power is not employed simply to bend and subdue

the will of the subjects. Power should be directed to truth-finding in which the participation of the one who obeys is indispensable. It is the truth that is discovered which should break loose and free the egoistic will both of the power-holder and the subject. In this way, exercise of power in the Church will be truly an exercise in truth-finding and obedience (*ob-audire*) a listening to the voice of truth. This means that an important quality required of power-holder in the Church is wisdom and attachment to truth, and it cannot be substituted by administrative skills. The same attunement to truth and the will to follow it is required as well of the subject. Apart from this relationship to truth, authority and obedience will be nothing but domination and servility much the same as we find in society.

In the light of what has been said, we are able to understand also the role of the Spirit in relation to authority. Spirit is the one who leads into all truth. The assistance of the Spirit is not for leading the power-holder in the Church to a superior truth concealed to his subjects or believers. Very often, in fact, the subjects — believers are able to see the truth more perspicaciously and promptly. The assistance of the Spirit is required rather to eliminate the forces of egoism, selfishness and short-sightedness which the ambiguity of power brings with it so that he or she may be able to see the truth in all its splendour. And much of this assistance of the Spirit is derived from listening to the truth that comes from the subjects — believers which truth can challenge the egoism and selfishness of the power-holder.

Pragmatism or practical expediency is something which cuts adrift power and truth which should be normally be united and held together. Power-holders in the Church as in society, tend to embrace practical expediency which twists truth out of shape. Another way of eliminating truth from the exercise of power is the claim to 'realism' which is often nothing else than myopia. Anything critical of the exercise of power is labelled as 'dream' or idealistic. This is a subtle way of keeping truth at a distance for fear of having to face its challenges.

Transmission without domination

A word must be added on power in relation to com

munication of truth in the Church. Human spirit is basically open to truth and goodness. This attunement to truth and moral sense must be the entry-point for any transmission of truth, moral norms, convictions etc. Traditions, behavioural patterns, norms etc. are internalized by the process of socialization. In case of rejection or resistance social control, pressure, sanctions and other punishments are imposed on the individuals by the particular society.

If the Church is to be an environment of freedom, truth and communion, all such coercive powers should be absent in transmission of its doctrines, ethical orientations, tradition etc. Communication should be free of all domineering exercise of power. This is to respect the human person, his spirit and conscience. The fact that something is true does not entitle anyone to impose it by force. The exercise of power in the Church should be such that it simply allows the truth to shine forth and let itself convince; it should not be a dominating power over the mind and conscience of the people. The only power is the power of truth. Any undue coercion and violent imposition will distort the mind and conscience of the people and lead to various kinds of psychological disorders and complexes.

It is natural that the process of internalization of doctrines, norms, tenets etc. will lead to a critical questioning of the given. It should not be suppressed by force. Only in this way what is given will cease to be something external and become part of one's self. As a religious agent, the Church has a hold over the conscience of the people through its moral power. Therefore the damages on the conscience of people which a domineering communication can cause will be greater and more serious.

Interpreting the tradition

Tradition and past heritage are important for the teaching of the Church and its life. Power in the Church, as elsewhere, finds a great ally in tradition. But the ambiguity of power can reveal itself also the way power makes use of tradition. A legitimate concern to be rooted in tradition and let the life of faith be nourished by the received heritage must be distinguished from the abuse of tradition, wittingly and

unwittingly, to maintain a particular order of things, power-relations or power-positions which may have little to do with orthodoxy of Christian faith and tradition.

Therefore, when a power-holder finds his or her subject unorthodox, not loyal to faith, or acting against tradition, it is not improper to ask whether such an allegation does not proceed from power concerns. One could enquire into it for the sake of truth and it can be done without any lack of respect to legitimate authorities. The ambiguous use to which tradition could be put warns us also about the necessity of interpreting tradition. Invoking tradition without caring to interpret it is open to suspicion whether it is intended to legitimize certain power-positions.

Critique of powers that be

After reflecting on the exercise of power in the Church, we should now give some thought to the relationship of the Church to systems and structures of power in society. The ambiguous nature of power is very striking in socio-political, economic and cultural realms. The complexities in which power operates in our society today makes the response of the Church a difficult one. Nevertheless, nobody can undermine the crucial importance of a correct attitude and options on the part of the Church to powers that rule the destinies of people — from village to the nation. The question of relationship to power is a question of the mission of the church since the various activities in which it is involved bear fruit depending upon the stand it adopts *vis à vis* the powers that be. By taking a firm position enlightened by the Gospel, the Church will be fulfilling her evangelical mission.

The response of the Church to powers of domination cannot be likened to the role of the opposition party to the ruling party. However, by virtue of the communion, truth, freedom, human dignity to which it is called to serve, the Church should unambiguously distance itself from any form of oppressive power-structures in the society — landlordism, casteism, etc. There should be no room to suspect that the Church by its commission or omission supports the dominant powers. This, as we know too well from history and present experience, seriously undermines the credibility of the Church. Taking a

distance alone is not enough. The Church should present moral resistance to all kinds of domination—resistance which should express itself in concrete actions.

It should be evident from the attitude, policies and options of the Church that it does not compromise with evil and forces of oppression, death and inhumanity. It is certainly wrong to foster hatred, and Church should never do it since it is clearly opposed to the Spirit, teaching, life, and death of Jesus. On the other hand, on the basis of the same Gospel, the Church cannot and should not compromise with powers and dominations, much less call this 'reconciliation'. This would be to divest it of the meaning of reconciliation and abuse it. But such uncompromising attitude and practice proves very difficult for the Church. For power-wielders in the Church motivated by practical expediency tend to support positively or by their silence the powers that be. When it is done unwittingly it reflects the sinful egoism of the power-holder and when unwittingly it is a situation of unenlightened leadership that has become blind to truth. If power holders in the Church become supporters of oppressive power structures in the society, one important reason could be that they do not have a deep spiritual experience. Only someone who has experienced beauty, truth, freedom and the mystery of human person will be able to revolt against dreadful situations of lie, unfreedom and inhumanity created by the powers that be.

In the concrete, the question is more complex. It is not always a case of having to choose between black and white. The question of Church's relationship to powers takes the form of a positive support in favour of order. The question of order, however, cannot be divorced from that of justice. The question a power-holder in the Church must ask is whether his support to order is also a support to justice. There is no gainsaying that both values are very important for human life and societal welfare. But when they come into conflict clear priority must go to justice. The Church should contribute, then, to the creation of an order where justice will be at home.

Exploding of power-supportive ideologies

An apt response which the Church could give effectively

to all powers and dominations is to criticize the ideology which is made use of for the maintenance of unjust socio-political and economic power-systems. These are very much in need of the support of ideology. The Church will call into question any unjust and dehumanizing power-system by tearing its ideological underpinnings. Thus the Church will be following the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus cuts the ground under the power-system maintained by Sadducees and others by challenging and exploding the legitimation given to it by the religious interpretation of Pharisees and others. He presents the image of God and this will free of all ideological interests and legitimation. It was a serious conflict and confrontation.

Socio-political, economic power-systems, in order to legitimize themselves employ religious symbols, ideas and seek the support and blessings of religious authorities. This helps them to obtain the loyalty of the people whom they dominate and oppress. Fascism, Nazism and all such systems have claimed to have God on their side. The racist apartheid regime of South Africa today claims the allegiance of its citizens by appealing to Rom. 13:1-7. The context in which Paul writes these words is conveniently overlooked. They were addressed to those who, in the context of the expectation of imminent parousia, thought that, since Jesus was their Lord, they were exempted from the obligation of obeying to secular authorities. We know Paul resisted political power as evidenced by his martyrdom in Rome, and John in the Book of Revelation speaks of the Empire as a harlot and its power as that of a beast (cfr. Rev. 17:1; 13:1).

The Church and especially its power-holders should never give place to turning God into idol that serves the vested interest of those who wield power. A humble Church, powerless in the eyes of the world is the one which is able to boldly unmask the ideological underpinnings of all systems and resist them. This is what we learn from the early Church. In the course of time, the privileged position it began to occupy in the Roman Empire turned out to be also its weakness. It did not have that powerlessness to be able to challenge the powers that be, but rather when the Empire began to collapse through Barbarian invasion, the Church began to take over its functions.

The unmasking of the ideological underpinnings of power

and domination should not be done in a spirit of self-righteousness. For in spite of grace and the power of the Spirit operative in the Church, its members are sinful; sinfulness is often most conspicuous in the way power is exercised. Therefore the Church should look at itself and ask whether the ideological camouflage it denounces is not also present in the power-exercise within its precincts. A prophetic challenge to powers and dominations will be credible only when the Church examines whether the ideological rust that corrodes every power has not come upon it too. The failure on the part of the Church to make a prophetic critique of unjust power-structures, (much worse would be compromise) could be a sign that such a malady has infected the power-holders in the Church.

Empowering the powerless

The Church whose mission it is to preach the Good News to the poor in the footsteps of Christ (cf Lk. 4:18-19) is also obliged to empower them by virtue of the same mission. Church's commitment to the defence of human rights and dignity is a way of empowering the victims of power in our society. However today, affirmation of human rights alone does not help. For, without power, justice, equality, freedom etc. remain mere fictitious rights. For these rights to be effective and operative, it is necessary that they be accompanied by power in a positive sense. To understand this, it is enough to think of, for example, how in our Indian society today even with the recognition of equality of all before the law, a poor innocent man can be convicted and a rich landlord could be acquitted of his crime simply because the former has no social and economic power to employ a lawyer who can argue his case while the latter has. The upholding of human rights and dignity of the powerless, 'the least' (Mt 25:40-45) of our brothers and sisters requires that they be empowered.

Empowering the powerless means that the Church support the solidarity of the 'least', the oppressed. The coming together of the oppressed in solidarity is necessary to acquire power. Only in this way freedom can be something concrete and effective. The marginalized in our society have the right not to let themselves be manipulated by powers and dominations. Contributing to the solidarity of the powerless groups is essential

for a Church that is committed to human rights and dignity.

Finally the Church cannot limit itself to addressing the powers and dominations. It does not suffice that the Church appeals to the powerful to share their power with the powerless groups. It is important today that the Church addresses the oppressed and the victims of power to committ themselves to the cause of justice and to challenge the unjust power-systems. Is it not true that through the ardent yearning of the poor for justice, peace and freedom and their commitment to the realization of these, that the Reign of God will dawn for all?

Conclusion

There can be two ways of exercising power. Power can be employed to dominate, to prevail over, to conquer etc. There is another way power can be exercised. It is not by imposing and dominating but by pulling, drawing. In this case power is not something exterior, but which is interior to reality. By its inner truth and beauty power is able to attract others to itself like a magnet. It is this kind of power that draws and pulls which must be operative in the Church and in our society. "When I am lifted up from the earth. I will draw all men to myself." (Jn 12: 32) This approach to power and truth has a lot of implication for the understanding of the practice of evangelization, magisterium etc.

The cross from which Jesus draws all men is a model of the power of powerlessness for the Church — a powerlessness that redeems the world, lets life blossom truth flourish and freedom bear fruit. A penitent and converted Peter could tell the lame man at the door [of the temple] "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk". "And he took him by the right hand and raised him up." (Acts 3:6-7) If we, the Church in India, are not able to tell today to the millions of our countrymen rendered powerless and lame in our societies, to stand up and walk, as Peter did, it is because, unlike him, we have gold and silver, and plenty indeed — the gold and silver of our power, money influence, institutions and so on. We can become a Church of hope, an empowering Church by learning to stand powerlessly at the foot of the cross — the cross on which today hang our powerless brothers and sisters.

Towards a Theology of Religions: an Indian Christian Perspective

Statement of Indian Theological Association
at its Twelfth Annual Meeting on December 28-31, 1988,
at St. Joseph's Pontifical Seminary,
Alwaye — 683 103 (Kerala)

The context

1. Pluralism and multiplicity in their various forms characterize the Asian continent. They mark the Indian scene in particular; and they are to be found in all areas of life and at all levels or reality: ethnic, linguistic, cultural and philosophical; economic and social; ideological, political and organizational, no less than spiritual and religious. Our concern for a theology of religions is born of the experience of religious pluralism. Cosmic or primal religions of tribal traditions are found on all the continents, while all the scripture religions are of Asian origin. Three of them developed in India; three others came from western Asia and one from Persia. Religious pluralism has always been in India but its recent manifestation calls for urgent attention. Hindus of different traditions, Buddhists and Jains of various schools, Muslims of more than one lineage, Christians of many churches, different groups of Sikhs and Parsees and several tribal communities have lived here side by side for many centuries. To a large number of people atheism is a way of life. This vast ocean of pluralism we are experiencing and living everyday.

2. There are diversities other than religion which affect everyday existence profoundly. Such are economic and political inequalities, oppressions, injustices and inhumanities. India's massive population is fragmented by class and caste differences and sex discriminations. Millions of people are nailed to crosses of poverty and destitution of social marginality and indignity, and of political repression and powerlessness. Feudal and capitalist structures reinforce each other to cement the *status quo* of privilege and poverty. Colonialism past and present has not only sapped the wealth of the country but distorted its eco-

conomic processes, hijacked its history, disrupted its culture, undermined its creative dynamism and injected into the national processes germs of internal colonialism. In this situation what millions of people seek is a minimum of tolerable existence.

3. Even religion is often used to lay hold on wealth and power which are then employed as tools of oppression. It is used to foster fundamentalism and foment communal rivalry, hatred and violence. There are species of religion which promise believers pie in the sky, teach an abstract world-denying gnosticism, and promote union with an absolute wholly alien to human concerns and the realities of history. Religions have also devised ways of suppressing just anger and blunting the revolutionary edge of faiths. Their thrust is often twisted from total human reality towards one-sided interiority, an apolitical spirituality and and other-worldliness.

4. Living immersed in this context, we ask if this constitutes a crisis, namely a situation at once a danger and an opportunity?

5. It is not only the facts and the challenges that go into the making of the context, but also the responses. The responses themselves are many and varied. One is the claim of each religion to absoluteness, universal validity and superiority. It seeks, therefore, to subordinate the other or to assimilate it, thus dissolving its otherness and specificity. Another response is to lead lives of isolation and of parallel monologues. A third is fear of the other - of being limited, challenged or swallowed up by the other. A fourth is seeing the other as an irritant and a threat, and seeking a replacement of suppression through theological constructions or physical force. A fifth response is a search for harmony and co-existence, more or less comfortable. And finally there is the desire to relate positively to the meaning system offered by the other — a search to enter into dialogue and communion, to exchange and share gifts, to work together for a world of greater justice, freedom and peace for all.

6. These responses have, in some form or other, always existed in the history of our land. All of them are still present and are operative in open or hidden ways. But some of these are gaining ground and becoming dominant and hopeful trends. One may recall here the paradigm developed by Teilhard de Chardin in his vision of the world's evolutionary pilgrimage towards the Omega point. Within each of the three stages of evolution (material, biological and cultural), there is first a fanning out process from the one or the few to the many and the diverse; and as this process reaches a maximum bulge, there sets in the reverse process of convergence. The many that diverged developing each its own wealth of potentialities now

seek to meet the others at a final and mutually fulfilling *rendez-vous*. Is a convergence perhaps of the world's cultures and religions beginning to happen in our days?

New situation

7. So then we find ourselves in a new situation. Some of the factors that constitute it may be mentioned.

a) Religious communities which once were ethnic and geographically confined have now become missionary in outlook and activity. They are fanning out and encountering new religious and secular partners and challengers.

b) Religions and cultures, oppressed in colonial times and expected by colonial minds to dwindle and disappear, are today renewing themselves and claiming their place in the sun and girding themselves up for march into a great future.

c) Various historical factors have brought us a clearer and profounder knowledge of the riches of the major religions, dispelling much of the ignorance which in the past littered fear, suspicion and hostility.

d) The new situation is particularly signalled and shaped by the development of inter-religious dialogue, of inculturation and of the liberation of oppressed peoples, broken cultures and distorted religions.

8. These features, especially the triple praxis just mentioned call for a new theology of religions. These require on the part of the Christians the vision of a new horizon of meaning to orient and sustain the struggle for a new world. Theologies of religions will emerge via theologies of dialogue, or cultural incarnation and of liberation, as well as of celebration of the other as other.

The Quest

9. While working to construct new theologies we keep raising questions and looking for answers.

i. We have taken note of the fact of religious pluralism. But could pluralism be affirmed as a right?

ii. Are the many religions part of God's design and provision for humankind? Does religious pluralism constitute a situation of grace?

iii. Is pluralism the outward expression of the infinite riches of the Absolute which no particular historical event, epoch, person or the tradition can adequately or exhaustively represent?

iv. Is pluralism then the law of life and reality?

v. What is the relation between the socio-cultural context,

the experience of the ultimate, the Faith-commitment and its expression in belief systems, rituals, symbols and ethical behaviour? What dialectics are at work among these?

vi. Is the faith-experience behind the different symbols really identical as the mystics seem to suggest, or is it different and specific in each religion? Are there one faith and many religions or many faiths and many religions?

vii. How in fact do diverse faiths/religions grow in the same cultural context? What are the factors involved?

viii. What then are the deeper truths of pluralism?

ix. What concrete conditions will constitute the possibility for the birth and growth of a theology of religions? What praxis is required? and what sources are to be tapped?

x. What quality of spirit are we to cultivate and what inner spaces to make inter-religious life genuine and the nurture of a theology of religions possible?

xi. Does not inter-religious life itself constitute an implicit theology of religions? Is not such a theology present and maturing within the triple praxis of dialogue, inculturation and liberation?

xii. Could there be authentic dialogue without accepting the partner as equal at the religious level? But if religious equality is accepted from the very start, what happens to our own deepest religious convictions? Is there any point in continuing to cling to them rather than passing over to the faith of the other?

xiii. At this point the crucial question of uniqueness arises. What is the nature of uniqueness in human (secular and religious) experience? How do several uniqueness-experiences relate to each other and meet in dialogue?

xiv. Is it possible then to have a theology of religions acceptable to adherents of all religions without watering down some truths, undermining some convictions, compromising some principles, or imposing one's own conceptions and positions?

xv. Or, is the possibility already present in the universal openness of all human persons to the Ultimate Reality? Is it not implied in the first article of the christian creed, and in all faith in One Absolute Ground/Source Reality?

xvi. And finally we ask: What is the relation between Truth and Love? Could anything that lacks love be (religiously) true?

10. We let such questions haunt us in the dark. We wrestle with them in the hope that through the praxis of Dialogue,

Inculturation and Liberation a genuine theology of religions will shape us and in due time come to birth.

Christian attitude to other Religions

11. In the history of the Church we can find a variety of responses to the religions of the world. The attitudes that have conditioned the approaches have not always been genuinely christian; but socio-political-economic and cultural factors have played a determining role in shaping them. Above all we find a conspicuous absence of a real encounter with the religions as religions on the level of experience.

12. In the early Church we notice a predominantly apologetical approach to other religions. But at the same time there was an openness to the culture and value systems of the people, as can be seen in the philosophical interpretations of faith, the symbolic systems of worship, spiritual categories of life, the administrative systems of the Churches. Starting with Justin, the ancient christian writers see the "Word" of God present in the wisdom and philosophy of the Greeks. We see here a tendency of inclusivism although Christianity is taken as the fulfilment of all wisdoms, philosophies and religions.

13. The encounter with Islam caused a radical change in the attitude of the Church with other faiths. Unlike the other encounters it was a confrontation of two socio-political powers rallying around two religions. This led to religious antagonism and total rejection or exclusivism. Here we witness to the reinforcement of a totally negative attitude to other faiths as can be seen in the development of a new terminology to designate those of other faiths as "infidels". But even in the case of the encounter with Islam we could see exceptions like Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa who represents the new spirit born of humanism and renaissance.

14. But it is with previous negative attitude that the western Church under the protection of colonial powers entered the third world and confronted the great world religions. The evangelizing mission of the Church was marked by expansionism leading almost to the total rejection of other religions and their value systems and cultural forms.

15. With the advent of the new human sciences there was a new opening towards the religions of the world. A discovery of the meaning of their symbols, sacred books, belief systems, and moral code brought about a change in the christian attitude towards them. They were looked upon as containing values and elements of truths though mixed up with error and superstition. Christian encounter then seemed to have the task of purifying and fulfilling them.

16. The various christian attitudes to other religions can be conveniently classified under the following headings: *Ecclesiocentrism*, *Christocentrism* and *Theocentrism*.

17. *Ecclesiocentrism* is the tendency of confining salvation within the boundaries of the visible Church. The consequence of the traditional teachings like "outside the Church there is no salvation" was the exaggerated missionary practice of converting the followers of other religions by whatever means.

18. *Christocentrism* could simply be described as the Christian's tendency to see the whole of reality in and through Christ, that is the Risen and glorified Lord (cf. Col. 1:15-20). In traditional theological terms, it refers to the understanding of Christ as the One and definitive mediator in whom the fulness of revelation has been accomplished (cf. Heb. 1:1). By his death and resurrection Christ made it possible for christians and all others alike, to receive grace and redemption, thus inaugurating the eschatological era. In this era, in which all mankind live, man's response to God's salvific initiative is in and through Christ, who is active in history even today. Thus Christ unites all peoples into one and he is the centre of history.

19. Responding to the modern religious situation and inspired by certain oriental traditions some theologians have proposed a theocentric way of understanding the relationship of Christianity to other religions, emphasizing the specificity as well as complementarity of all religions. *Theocentrism* is thus an attempt to find a common theological platform in dialogue with adherents of other faiths. It refers to the understanding of God as the source/author of all salvation. He is the creator; he is the One who saves. He has manifold ways of saving man. Theocentrism is also based on the fact that Jesus himself is centred on his Father. He proclaimed himself as the Way to the Father. Therefore the mystery of Jesus Christ cannot be interpreted except theocentrically.

Locus theologicus for a theology of religions

20. It is in this context that we understand recent trends in theology which is increasingly being defined in terms of reflection on human liberative praxis. This *anthropocentric approach* takes the humans in their concrete situation and in their totality. Common liberative action and inculturation, on the one hand, and fundamentalism and communalism on the other, are signs on which theologians have to reflect to develop a theology of religions. Dialogue, liberation and inculturation are efforts among these trends that constitute the new *locus theologicus*.

21. *Dialogue*: We are more and more becoming aware that

man's personal and social life and religion itself are dialogically structured. Dialogue here is understood as a mode of being and a way of life. It is a sharing and process of mutual enrichment. Like all realities, dialogue too is a paradox: a paradox of rootedness and mobility, conviction and openness, commitment to one's own ideals and open appreciation and acceptance of others. It implies limitations and perfections, pain and joy; it is a process of listening and discovering the other; it is a movement towards growth in truth and love, and way to restructuring and reconditioning human life and society.

22. Genuine dialogue, therefore, implies that the partners respect one another, that they are sincerely engaged in a common search that they want to learn from one another, and that they communicate what is deepest in them. Hence there can be no dialogue without accepting the equality of partners. In dialogue there is no hidden *agenda*, but only openness, respect and love. This is the reason why dialogue allows both critical and appreciative approach to anything or to any person without being condemnatory. Since in dialogue the partners are open to truth and love they are challenges to refashion their own and their society's mode of life and activities according to the progressive awareness of truth.

23. From the beginning of our history various religious groups have been living in a more or less harmonious manner interacting one another and undergoing a process of *osmosis*. This is an important fact on which theologians have reflected very little. But today's condition demands more than this. The enlightened members of various religions and ideologies are challenged to take up the task of dialogue both at the thought and action levels in order to liberate our own people and our own religious communities from the manifold alienations and inhumanities.

24. Dialogue, therefore, is not merely a joint exercise in intellectual reflection, but it is a process of liberation, and entrance into the religious experience, faith commitment and worship and a rooting of ourselves and our society into the religio-cultural *milieux* of the people.

25. *Liberation*: Every religion and every ideology as a way of life and as a meaning system are oriented towards the liberation of man, though liberation is understood in different ways. In a country like India where there is so much socio-political inequality, injustice, oppression and religious superstition, liberation is not merely to be understood in a spiritual way, but it has also socio-political and religious implications. When Jesus preached the reign of God he preached not merely a spiritual Kingdom, but God's rule which has to be en-

fleshed in human life and society. This deep human and religious concern is to be found in the Buddha's ideal of a casteless society, and in the Hindu yearning for Ramarajya and in the hope of a classless society envisaged by secular ideologies. We in India are aware that this liberative process cannot be successfully achieved by one community or ideological group alone. The different communities have to come together for the transformation of society and for the betterment of "Man" who is their common centre as well as rallying point. This common endeavour demands from each group that it becomes critical of itself, purifies itself, in order that it may unselfishly involve itself in the liberative process. The oppressed and the oppressor need liberation. The heart of man has to be purified from the inner thirst of which the Bhddha speaks, from the sinfulness on which Christ insists, from illusory existence to which the author of the Gita refers, and from the social and individual alienation analysed by Marx. Such a co-operation will challenge every religious community to re-think its own identity in its relationship to the other community. This is a dialogical process, and at this moment we christians believe that God is challenging the different societies in India to undertake this task.

26. Liberative process has also a cultural task. We know that the third world cultures are threatened by the rationalistic, technocratic and dominating cultures of the West. This is specially true of our country, whose holistic and cosmocentric culture which envisions the continuity between the divine-human and nature is in danger. We are aware that the secular and technological cultures have certain positive elements which have to be harmoniously integrated for our welfare. Yet the planned imposition of this dominating culture already generating so much misery and oppression needs to be resisted. This too is a liberative task.

27. Liberation has also an ecological dimension. The holistic conception of our human existence and of the universe should become the conviction of every community that man must be liberated from the predatory greed which does not respect the sacredness of man and nature. This implies that religions and ideologies which structure and form the convictions of man and shape society must be holistically understood. They should become agents of liberation dissuading their adherents from excessive exploitation of Nature and its resources. This task of total liberation demands from every community that it rethinks its own claims of self-identity and growth *vis-à-vis* the other communities.

28. *Inculturation*: Culture is an integral part of man's in-

dividual and social life and religion itself is the heart or root of culture. Culture is an evolving reality, through the interaction with other cultures and through the resultant new experiences. This is the reason why inculturation is a dynamic process affecting every society and every individual. Any religion has to adapt itself constantly to the changing modes and values of life, if it has to survive in the modern world, especially when other cultures and religions challenge their way of life and value systems.

29. As far as the Indian Christians are concerned inculturation becomes a necessity because of certain historical factors. In the christian context inculturation means primarily the total living of christian faith in a particular cultural setting of the Indian cultural mosaic. This is why inculturation is the creative assimilation and not mere borrowing. Inculturation should not be narrowed down to the idea of assimilating certain elements of a particular culture. If religion is the core of culture, inculturation certainly implies entry into the total religious ethos of the people. This process will demand from the christians the reinterpretation of their self-identity. Moreover inculturation is not antiquarianism nor elitism, but it is our *at-one-ness* with different subcultures and groups such as the Dalits. On the one side inculturation implies the shedding of what is foreign, colonial and alienative; on the other, it demands a critical assimilation of the cultural elements which are assumed. If inculturation is understood in this sense, then naturally, each religious community and ideology is called upon to reflect upon its relationship between religion and culture. The task of inculturation demands from each religious community a thorough reflection on its religious specificity as well as its particular sharing in a common culture.

The Christian theological task

30. Dialogue, common liberative action and the process of inculturation are realities which are relatively new in the Church and in other communities. We christians have not yet sufficiently reflected on these realities. Moreover as mentioned above, the dialogue of daily life between various communities that constantly takes place in our country has not been theologically evaluated and articulated creatively. On the one hand we christians must carry on this dialogue of life, on the other, we must positively foster in smaller and larger groups inter-religious dialogue leading to liberative actions and inculturation. This praxis must be already considered theology in action. It will also enable us christians to understand anew christian specificity and the relationship of christian community to other communities.

31. Already, at least in an incipient manner inter-religious dialogue, common actions for the building of a better society and the inculturation process are taking place in India. It is out of this praxis that Indian theologians have been attempting to move away from a narrow christocentrism to a theocentrism trying at the same time to be faithful to their commitment to God and to man in Christ. Assuredly christocentrism does not exclude theocentrism. But in the Indian context theocentrism implies the possibility of understanding other religions as ways offered by the common author of life and salvation, as his first self-gift. These theologians are aware that theocentrism by itself does not articulate a universal theology of religions, nor can it take into its orbit secular and atheistic ideologies. Today we christians from our faith-angle speak of christocentrism and theocentrism, knowing that one does not exclude the other. On the one hand the theologian wants to safeguard the specificity of each religion and ideology. On the other he accepts the communality and inter-relationship between them. Here the theology of communication has a special significance. Specificity stands for self-identity or for that which distinguishes one reality from another. It does not mean the unconditional Absolute. Religion being a comprehensive system offering meaning and purpose to the totality of human life, the specific religious commitment takes on an absolute character. But this absolute character is neither exclusive nor is it to be identified with the absolute transcendent.

32. A christian is quite conscious that he can theologize only as a christian who finds his commitment to God, human-kind and nature in Jesus Christ in whom he finds his specificity. That is why he is simultaneously christocentric and theocentric, as far as the transcendent pole of religion is concerned. He is anthropocentric in his self-understanding *vis-a-vis* secular ideologies, because man is the other pole of religion. It is understood that the christian's faith commitment to God in Christ does not prevent him from accepting the sincere testimonies of his dialogue partners that they have encountered God through other mediations. The christian is also convinced that Jesus Christ and his life, especially his

death and resurrection have a universal significance for the total liberation of man. At the same time he is aware that the testimony of his dialogue partner can lead him to see more and more the depth and intensity of the mystery of God manifested in Christ.

Inter-religious praxis

33. For the transformation of society, what would it mean to have *interreligious praxis*? It would mean not merely working with Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, Parsis, Sikhs etc., – inviting them merely to participate in what we plan, organize, finance, execute, but rather collaborating in mutual trust and fellowship. While many among us today are perhaps committing ourselves totally to the transformation of society, we have not so far had the courage to utilise mutually the rich religious heritage and resources of our peoples of different faiths. This would include also the recognition of the resources that a committed Marxist or atheist can bring to a common human struggle.

34. Similarly this mutual sharing would apply too to other efforts at the social, cultural and religious levels. At the latter level more explicitly, it would also mean an openness to *learning* and using other Scripture prayers, forms of sadhana, gradually having more participation in each other's worship .. until we learn from others and realize the call of the Father who seeks worshippers who will *worship him* neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem, but in *spirit* and in *truth*.

Conclusion

35. The christian community in India is challenged today to enter more and more deeply into the praxis of dialogue, common commitment to and action for a better society. This togetherness of religious communities and ideological movements will not only bring about greater and better understanding between the communities but it will also open new avenues to each other's world views, values and perceptions. This process, on the one hand, will unmask the ideological self-sufficiency in which each community is imprisoned and, on the other, will manifest the complementary character of dif-

ferent world views in which religions and ideologies exist and operate. It is at this stage that we start critically questioning our world view and search for corrections in the complementary elements of other world views and in turn exercise our prophetic role in providing corrections also to other world-visions. Thus we create the conditions necessary for the emergence of a genuine Indian Christian theology of religions.

36. We have not invented here any new theology of religions. Our task remains unfinished. But we theologians from all over India gathered here at St. Joseph's Pont. Seminary, Alwaye, are convinced that a new theology of religions will gradually emerge in the inter-religious praxis of dialogue, liberative action and inculturation. Our continuous search together and intense praxis in the coming years may help us to take another step in the articulation of a theology of religions.

**Statement about Ownership and other Particulars
about Jeevadhara**

(Form V — see Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication : Kottayam
2. Periodicity of its Publication : Monthly
3. Publisher's Name : Chairman, J. T. S.
(Fr. J. Constantine Manalel, CMI)
Nationality : Indian
Address : Jeevadhara
: Kottayam - 686 017, Kerala
4. Printer's Name : Fr. J. Constantine Manalel, CMI
Nationality : Indian
Address : Jeevadhara
: Kottayam
5. Editor's Name : Fr. J. Constantine Manalel, CMI
Nationality : Indian
Address : Jeevadhara
: Kottayam

Names and addresses of individuals who own the Newspaper
(and partners or shareholders holding more than one percent
of the total capital):

Jeevadhara Theological Society (J. T. S.)

I, J. Constantine Manalel, hereby declare that the particulars
given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief

(Sd)
Publisher